Shepherding the Household of God

A Pastoral Commentary on 1 Timothy and Titus

Sound Doctrine, Godly Living, and the Household of God

Reed S. Rusniak

Table of Contents

Preface to the Study of 1 Timothy 5

Introduction: The Letter, the Man, and the City 7

The City of Ephesus 7

Timothy the Man 8

The Pastoral Epistles 10

The Structure of the Letter 10

Chapter One: Apostolic Authority, False Teaching, and the Grace of God (1:1–20) 12

The Salutation (1:1–2) 12

The Charge Against False Teaching (1:3–7) 13

The Law and the Gospel (1:8–17) 16

The Charge Renewed (1:18–20) 18

Study Questions 20

Chapter Two: Prayer, Women, and the Worship of the Household of God (2:1–15) 21

The Priority of Congregational Prayer (2:1–2) 21

The Theological Foundation for Prayer (2:3–8) 23

A Woman's Dress and Demeanor (2:9–10) 26

A Woman's Behavior in the Assembly (2:11–14) 28

A Woman's Salvation (2:15) 29

Study Questions 31

Chapter Three: The Qualifications for Leadership in the Household of God (3:1–16) 32

A Noble Task (3:1) 32

Two Offices in the Church (3:1–13) 33

The Qualifications for Overseers (3:2–7) 34

The Office of Deacon (3:8–13) 37

The Heart of the Letter (3:14–16) 39

Study Questions 41

Chapter Four: False Teaching and the Character of the True Minister (4:1–16) 42

The Prediction and the Reality (4:1–3a) 42

The Nature of False Teaching in Ephesus (4:1b–5) 43

The Origins of False Teaching (4:1b, 2) 44

Guarding Against False Teaching (4:3b–5) 46

Sound Teaching and Godliness (4:6–10) 46
Timothy as Model of the Faithful Teacher (4:11–16) 47
Study Questions 50
Chapter Five: Shepherding the Household of God (5:1–6:2) 51
The Delicacy of Pastoral Relationships (5:1–2) 51
The Church and Its Widows (5:3–16) 52
The Congregation and Its Elders (5:17–25) 54
Instructions Regarding Slaves (6:1–2) 56
Study Questions 58
Chapter Six: The Good Fight of Faith and the Final Charge (6:2b–21) 59
The Letter's Beginning and End: A Deliberate Structure 59
The Final Treatment of False Teaching (6:2b–6) 59
Godliness and Contentment (6:6–10) 61
Instructions to the Wealthy (6:17–19) 63
The Final Personal Charge (6:11–16, 20–:21) 64
Study Questions 67
Conclusion: The Household of God in Every Age 68
I Timothy – Full Outline 70
Preface to the Study of Titus 88
Titus Chapter One: Apostolic Mission, Godly Elders, and the Cretan Opposition (1:1–16) 89
Opening Salutation (1:1–4) 89
The Elders (1:5–9) 92
The Cretan Opposition (1:10–16) 95
Study Questions 99
Titus Chapter Two: Pastoral Duties and the Grace of God (2:1–15) 100
Pastoral Duties (2:1–10) 100
Teaching for Men and Titus (2:1–2, 2:6–8) 100
Teaching for Women (2:3–5) 102
Teaching for Workers (2:9–10) 103
Theological Framework and Motivation for Ministry (2:11–15) 104
Conclusion (2:15) 107
Study Questions 109

Titus Chapter Three: Living as the Church in This World (3:1–15) *110*
The Christian in the World (3:1–2) **110**
The Revelation of God's Kindness and Love in Christ (3:3–8) **111**
Trustworthy Saying (3:8) **117**
Final Instructions (3:9–15) **118**
Study Questions **120**
Conclusion: Adorning the Doctrine of God Our Savior *121*
Epistle to Titus Outline *123*

First Letter to Timothy

Sound Doctrine, Godly Living, and the Household of God

Preface to the Study of 1 Timothy

The letter the Apostle Paul wrote to his young colleague Timothy is among the most practical and pastorally tender documents in the New Testament. It was addressed to a specific man facing a unique crisis in a particular city, yet every word remains as relevant to the church in every generation as it was to the believers in Ephesus in the first century. This is the nature of inspired Scripture. Grounded in real events and people, it makes the application relevant to all ages. It speaks from a particular moment into every moment that follows because the God who inspired it is the same Sovereign God who rules over all ages.

This study began as a series of lessons intended for two Bible colleges in Zambia. It is not primarily a technical work of scholarship, though it gratefully draws on scholarly resources. It is written by someone who has spent many years in the Word of God, taught it to ordinary believers, and found it to be just what it claims: living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword.[1] The aim has not been to produce an academic commentary, but to open this letter in a way that helps believers understand it more clearly, love it more deeply, and live it out more faithfully.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy with a clear and urgent purpose, and that purpose remains unchanged. The household of God, the church of the living God, still needs sound leadership and sound doctrine. False teaching continues to threaten Christ's congregation in every generation, even though it may take different forms over time. The call to prayer, to godly order in worship, to integrity in leadership, to faithful care for those in need, and to contentment in Christ rather than the love of money is not just a first-century concern. They are permanent aspects of the church's life, rooted in the character of the God who created the church and in the gospel that the church exists to proclaim.

A word about the structure of this study may be helpful. The manuscript follows the outline of the letter itself, moving section by section and pausing at each major unit to draw out its meaning, theological significance, and practical application for both the believer and the congregation. Each chapter ends with a set of questions designed for personal reflection or group discussion. The hope

[1] Hebrews 4:12.

is that this material will be truly useful not only for individual reading but also for the kind of engagement with Scripture that Paul encouraged when he urged Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible. The reader is urged to keep an open Bible at hand throughout, because no study of the Word can substitute for the reading of the Word itself. The original text of First Timothy is the authority. This study, written by an imperfect man, is only a guide to understanding it.

Reed S. Rusniak

Introduction: The Letter, the Man, and the City

The City of Ephesus

No letter in the New Testament can be fully understood without considering the context in which it was written and received. First Timothy is no exception. To read this letter well, it is important to know something about the city (Ephesus) where Timothy was serving. The challenges Paul addresses were not abstract theological issues disconnected from real life. They were real problems, faced by real people, in a real city that vividly represented the world into which the gospel had come.

Ephesus lay on the western coast of what is now Turkey, near the mouth of the Cayster River where it met the Aegean Sea. In the first century, it was among the largest and most prosperous cities in the Roman Empire, rivaling Alexandria and Antioch in size and significance. Population estimates vary, but the city likely housed several hundred thousand people, drawing residents from across the Mediterranean because of its strategic harbor, thriving commerce, and position at the intersection of major east-west trade routes. Ephesus was truly cosmopolitan, a place where Greek culture, Roman authority, and the religious traditions of the ancient East merged into a complex and sometimes volatile mix.

The most prominent religious institution in Ephesus was the temple of Artemis, known to the Romans as Diana, which was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This temple was enormous, about four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, built mostly of marble, adorned with sculptures, and surrounded by a vast colonnade. The cult of Artemis was not merely a local religious preference. It was closely integrated into the city's economic and social life at every level. Craftsmen earned their living by making silver shrines and small images of the goddess for pilgrims who traveled from afar. Festivals in honor of Artemis drew huge crowds and generated significant revenue. The worship of Artemis and the commercial life of Ephesus were inseparable, which is why the arrival of the gospel immediately created economic and social tension.

The book of Acts records the remarkable events of Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus in chapter nineteen. He spent approximately three years in the city, longer than he remained in any other single location during his missionary travels. He began in the synagogue, as was his practice, reasoning from the Scriptures about the kingdom of God. When opposition arose, he moved to the

lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he taught daily for two years, with the result, Luke tells us, that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Extraordinary miracles accompanied this ministry. Those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them, and the value of what was burned came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

This was then followed by a riot in the city. A silversmith named Demetrius gathered his fellow craftsmen and stirred them up against Paul and the gospel, arguing that if people continued to turn from idols to the living God, their trade in silver shrines of Artemis would be ruined and the great goddess herself would be robbed of her honor. The crowd took up the chant, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians, and the city was thrown into chaos. Paul wanted to enter the assembly, but his companions prevented him; eventually, the city clerk managed to quiet the crowd and restore order. The message was plain, however: the gospel of Jesus Christ was not a private religious matter. It was a threat to the entire economic and religious order of one of the empire's greatest cities. Paul left Ephesus for Greece soon afterward, though not before the church there had taken deep root.

It was into this city, with all its complexity and spiritual danger, that Paul later sent the young Timothy to serve. Timothy had been with Paul during those Ephesian years and knew the city and the congregation well. Now, though, the circumstances had changed. False teachers had arisen within the congregation itself, and the challenge they posed to the church's integrity required exactly the kind of steady, courageous, apostolically grounded ministry that Paul wanted Timothy to provide.

Timothy the Man

Timothy is first introduced in the narrative of Acts in chapter sixteen, when Paul and Silas arrive at Lystra on the second missionary journey. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium, Luke tells us, which means he had already established a reputation for godliness and integrity in his home communities before Paul ever called him to travel. He was the son of a Jewish mother, Eunice, and a Greek father, a mixed heritage that would prove both useful and complicated in a ministry that reached across Jewish and Gentile communities. His mother and his grandmother Lois had taught him the Scriptures from his childhood, as Paul recalls with warmth in his second

letter to Timothy, and that foundation in the Word of God would prove essential to everything that followed.

Paul came to care for Timothy with a deep, fatherly affection, and this was more than just a figure of speech. In a ministry that was often marked by loneliness, danger, and physical hardship, having the companionship of a trustworthy partner was invaluable. Timothy traveled with Paul, was sent as Paul's representative to churches in need of pastoral guidance, and received from Paul a level of personal instruction and formation that far surpassed any formal education. Timothy is mentioned more frequently than any other co-worker in Paul's letters, and the depth of Paul's trust is clear in the important responsibilities he gave to Timothy.

Timothy faced his own challenges nonetheless. Paul's letters suggest that, while Timothy had genuine gifts, Scripture indicates he sometimes struggled with timidity and possibly with physical frailty. Paul even recommended a little wine to him for his stomach's sake. Timothy was young by the standards of those who usually held authority in the ancient world, and this youth made him vulnerable to criticism from those in Ephesus who sought to undermine his leadership. Paul's repeated encouragements for Timothy to be bold, not to let anyone look down on his youth, and to fan into flame the gift of God in him reveal both Paul's pastoral concern and the real challenges Timothy faced.

The situation in Ephesus required a special kind of courage, the courage to confront false teaching within the church, not just to preach the gospel to those outside. Evangelism, for all its difficulties, has a certain clarity. The false teachers in Ephesus were not outsiders or strangers promoting a foreign religion in the public square. They were likely men who had been part of the church, who knew the Scriptures to some degree, who had formed relationships within the community, and whose teaching was convincing enough to attract followers. Confronting such individuals demands theological clarity, pastoral sensitivity, and personal courage, qualities that are difficult for anyone, and especially challenging for someone with Timothy's temperament.

Paul's letter to Timothy is, among other things, a gift of apostolic authority entrusted to a young minister in need. When Timothy read this letter in the congregation at Ephesus, he was reading words that carried the full weight of Paul's apostleship and, through Paul, the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That authority was meant to strengthen Timothy's hand, give him the

standing he needed to confront the false teachers, and equip him for the long, faithful ministry Paul was calling him to undertake.

The Pastoral Epistles

First Timothy belongs to a group of three letters known since the eighteenth century as the Pastoral Epistles, the other two being Second Timothy and Titus. The designation is very appropriate. All three letters are addressed to individuals who are engaged in pastoral ministry, and all three share a common set of concerns: the character and qualifications of church leaders, the threat posed by false teaching, the importance of sound doctrine for the life and witness of the congregation, and the practical details of congregational life and order. Together they constitute Paul's most sustained reflection on the nature and responsibilities of the church and its leadership.

These three letters were almost certainly written late in Paul's life and ministry. The conventional view is that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment, described at the end of Acts, and undertook further missionary travels before being arrested a second time and ultimately martyred under Nero. First Timothy and Titus were written during the period of renewed ministry between the two imprisonments. Second Timothy was written from his second imprisonment, with the awareness of death close at hand.

This historical context gives the Pastoral Epistles their distinctive character. These are the writings of an apostle who knows his time is short and is deeply concerned about what will happen to the churches after he is gone. The strong emphasis on false teaching, which runs through all three letters, reflects Paul's repeated warnings about the wolves that would come among the flock after the apostolic generation had passed. Now, those wolves were already present in Ephesus and Crete, and Paul was writing to prepare the next generation of ministers and congregations to recognize and resist them.

The Structure of the Letter

First Timothy does not follow the pattern of Paul's longer theological letters, such as Romans or Galatians, which develop extended arguments before turning to practical application. Instead, it reads more like a pastoral directive, moving among different concerns as the situation demands. Beneath this apparent variety, however, there is a real unity of purpose, most clearly stated in

chapter three, verse fifteen: Paul writes so that believers "may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

The image of the household of God is the guiding metaphor for the entire letter. In the ancient world, a household was not just a residence; it was a structured community with defined roles, patterns of authority and responsibility, and shared purposes that held its members together. When Paul refers to the church as the "household of God," he is saying that the congregation of Christ operates in much the same way: it has a head, it has defined structures and roles, it pursues purposes that go beyond any individual member, and it maintains an order that reflects the character and will of God. The false teachers in Ephesus, seen in this light, were not just theological problems. They were disrupting the order of God's household, bringing confusion where God intended clarity, division where God intended unity, and speculation where God intended faith.

The letter may be divided into six major sections that roughly align with the chapters of this study. Chapter one addresses the letter's opening and the immediate concern about false teaching. Chapter two turns to congregational prayer and the role of women in the assembly. Chapter three describes the qualifications for church leaders. Chapter four returns to false teaching and examines the character of the faithful minister. Chapter five outlines the pastor's responsibilities to different groups within the congregation, including widows and elders. Chapter six concludes the letter with final instructions about false teaching, contentment, and a personal charge to Timothy. Throughout, the concern for proper conduct in the household of God unites these varied instructions into a coherent and urgent message.

Chapter One: Apostolic Authority, False Teaching, and the Grace of God (1:1–20)

The Salutation (1:1–2)

The opening two verses of First Timothy deserve more careful attention than they often get. It is easy to see the greeting as just a formality, like the date and address in a modern letter, and skip ahead to what seems more important. However, the Apostle Paul never wrote in a merely formulaic way. Even in the traditional format of ancient letter-writing, his theological perspective comes through, and the start of First Timothy is no exception.

He introduces himself as "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." The word "command" is significant. Paul does not simply call himself an apostle, as was his custom. He makes it clear that his apostleship originates in and is defined by a word meaning an official royal decree or military order. In the ancient world, this term was associated with the binding commands of rulers and officials. By using it to describe his apostolic calling, Paul makes an important point: this was not a career he chose, a vocation he decided to enter, or a role assigned to him by the church. It was a command from the true and living God. His apostleship is an act of divine sovereignty, and the letter he is about to write carries the full authority of that divine command.

Why would Paul emphasize his apostleship so strongly in a letter to Timothy, who already knew and respected his authority? The most likely reason is that the letter was intended to be read aloud to the entire congregation in Ephesus. Timothy needed the backing of this letter's authority to address the false teachers, and the congregation needed to recognize from the very beginning that these instructions carried the full weight of apostolic authority. The opening is not just for Timothy. It speaks, through Timothy, to everyone in Ephesus who would hear it.

The two names for God in verse one are also significant. God is called "our Savior," and Christ Jesus is called "our hope." The title "God our Savior" looks back to all that God has already accomplished. He is the Savior who has acted in history to rescue sinners from their rebellion. This title, which appears often in the Pastoral Epistles, reflects a deep understanding of what God has

done in Christ: the incarnation, the atoning death, the resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit. The church does not serve a God who might save or who is still working toward salvation. It serves a God who has saved, who has acted, and whose work is complete and unchangeable.

Christ Jesus is called "our hope." This title looks forward. In the New Testament, hope is not just wishful thinking or simple optimism. It is a confident expectation based on God's character and promises. The hope that Christ Jesus represents includes His return, the resurrection of the dead, the final redemption of all things, and the new creation where righteousness dwells. Paul mentions this hope again in his letter to Titus, calling it "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The minister of the gospel lives between these two realities: what God has already done and what He has yet to do. Both give seriousness and urgency to the work.

Timothy is addressed as "my true child in the faith." This is one of Paul's most affectionate expressions. The word true means genuine or legitimate, not fake or counterfeit. Timothy is not called Paul's child in some vague way. He is his true child, a son in the faith shaped by the gospel and by years of ministry with Paul. This greeting is filled with fatherly warmth, and this affection colors everything that follows. The strong instructions and urgent commands in the letter are always given in the context of real and deep love.

Paul's greeting, "grace mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord," is a little different from his usual opening, which is typically grace and peace. The addition of mercy is unique to the Pastoral Epistles and is worth noticing. Grace is God's undeserved favor, giving us all we need for life and godliness. Peace is the settled well-being that comes from being right with God. Mercy is God's tender compassion in response to human weakness and failure. Writing to a young minister facing difficult challenges, Paul adds mercy, recognizing that Timothy will need not just God's sustaining grace and peace, but also the compassionate mercy of a God who understands his servant's weakness and does not despise it.

The Charge Against False Teaching (1:3–7)

Paul moves straight from the greeting to the urgent issue at hand. There is no pause for pleasantries, no extended thanksgiving for Timothy's ministry, and no theological introduction like those in Romans or Galatians. The reason for writing is too pressing. "As I urged you when I was going to

Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). The first substantive word of the letter, after the greeting, is a command.

Paul's urging that Timothy remain in Ephesus is significant. It could suggest that Timothy may have wanted to leave, which is understandable given the difficult situation, the real opposition, and the emotional and spiritual challenge of confronting people within one's own congregation. Paul's urging shows his apostolic authority as well as his pastoral understanding of Timothy. He knew Timothy well enough to see that his young colleague might need direct encouragement to stay and face what needed to be faced.

Who were the false teachers? Paul refers to them as "certain persons," a deliberately vague phrase that has led to much scholarly discussion. The most likely explanation, based on evidence from the letter and from Acts 20, is that these men were former members, and perhaps even elders, of the Ephesian church. Paul had warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 that from among your own selves men would "arise speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." By the time he writes First Timothy, that warning has become reality. The wolves are inside the flock, disguised as sheep.

Paul describes the nature of their teaching in two ways. First, they teach a "different doctrine," a phrase that translates a single Greek verb Paul seems to have coined for this purpose. This word does not appear in any other Greek literature outside of Paul's letters. It is used again in chapter six, verse three, which helps bracket the middle sections of the letter and shows that concern about false teaching appears throughout the letter. The word "different" here does not mean a slight variation or emphasis, but a teaching that contradicts, departs from, or replaces the true apostolic gospel.

Second, Paul says these false teachers "devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." The exact nature of these has been debated, but the most likely explanation is that they involved speculative and creative expansions on Old Testament genealogies and stories. Perhaps interpretive additions that made for interesting discussions but led nowhere helpful. Paul makes a similar point in his letter to Titus, where he mentions Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. Whatever the exact content, Paul's verdict is clear: these teachings "promote speculation rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith." The real test of any

teaching is not whether it is intellectually stimulating, but whether it produces the kind of faithful, God-focused life that the gospel is meant to create.

The word translated “stewardship” comes from the Greek word that gives us “economy.” It suggests careful, responsible management of what has been entrusted to someone. God has entrusted the gospel to the church, and the proper response is not speculation and endless debate, but faithful living and faithful proclamation. Teaching that produces speculation rather than faithfulness has failed at the most basic level, no matter how sophisticated or learned it may seem.

Verse five is one of the most important sentences in the entire letter because it states the positive goal that serves as the standard for all teaching: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” These three qualities: a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, are not separate requirements but aspects of the same truth: a life truly transformed by the gospel and genuinely directed toward God. Love that flows from such a life is not just a feeling or a social courtesy. It is the practical expression of a soul changed by God’s grace and turned toward the good of others.

The false teachers in Ephesus had drifted far from the truth. They turned away from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith. As a result, their words became empty, leading only to endless talk that never truly helps or builds up a believer. Paul gently warns us to be careful. If a teaching draws us more into arguments than into love or fills our minds with questions more than it strengthens our faithfulness, something is not right. In the end, what a teaching produces in our lives shows whether it is truly from God.

Verse seven gives one of the most insightful descriptions of false teachers in the New Testament. They “desiring to be teachers of the law, yet they do not understand what they are saying or what they confidently claim.” The mixture of ambition, confident assertion, and deep misunderstanding is especially dangerous. These were not people who were humbly uncertain about difficult issues and honestly searching for the truth. They were people who were confidently and aggressively mistaken, and who had enough speaking skills or social influence to gain followers. Nothing harms a congregation more than a teacher who speaks with great confidence but little understanding. The confident tone hides the emptiness of the message, and naïve people follow the voice because it

sounds authoritative, even when it is not the truth of God's Word. An untold number of cults stem from this exact problem.

The Law and the Gospel (1:8–17)

Paul pauses to clarify the proper relationship between the law of God and the gospel of Christ, because this relationship lies at the heart of the false teachers' error. He begins by affirming what must not be denied: the law is good if used lawfully. This double use of the same root word is intentional and meaningful. The law has a legitimate use, and the false teachers are not using it properly. Paul is not dismissing the law. He is insisting on its right use.

What is the right use of the law? Paul's answer is both clear and pastorally important. The law was not given for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane. He then lists sins that roughly follow the order of the Ten Commandments. The law acts as a diagnostic tool, a mirror revealing who we are, and a standard that exposes the gap between what God requires and what we can accomplish on our own. When the Holy Spirit applies the law to our conscience, it brings conviction of sin and drives us to seek righteousness outside of ourselves. The law shows us our need for the gospel by revealing how deeply we fall short before God.

This is the right use of the law. The wrong use treats the law as material for speculation, something to be debated, or as a way to showcase a teacher's knowledge without leading anyone to the cross. The false teachers in Ephesus were misusing the law by making it an end in itself rather than using it as the instrument God intended.

Paul then introduces the first of his "trustworthy sayings." This phrase appears five times in the Pastoral Epistles and seems to mark recognized summaries of Christian truth that were already well known in the early church. These sayings may have been used in worship, teaching, or the catechism of new believers. They express the Christian community's core convictions in a memorable form. The first is this: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

It would be hard to say more in fewer words. The eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, came into the world. The verb "came" implies a prior existence, a home from which he entered our human condition. He came into the world, not to a sheltered part of it, but to the fullness

of human life, with all its suffering, limitations, and mortality. The purpose of his coming is sharply defined: to "save sinners." Not to enlighten the searching, inspire the morally earnest, or provide a model for self-improvement, but to save sinners, rescue the lost, redeem the enslaved, and justify the condemned. The gospel is for sinners, and sinners are those who know they cannot save themselves.

Paul's personal testimony in verses twelve through sixteen puts this truth into vivid, concrete terms. He presents himself as the prime example of the gospel's power: "Of whom I am the foremost," he says. This is not false humility. Paul knows his past. He watched Stephen be stoned, dragged believers from their homes, sent them to prison, and breathed threats and murder against the Lord's disciples, even pursuing them to other cities. If ever there were someone who seemed beyond the reach of grace, it was Saul of Tarsus.

Saul, however, received God's great mercy, and he writes with a quiet wonder that still carries its sense of astonishment across the centuries. The mercy Paul received was not just personal; it was intended to be an example. "I received mercy for this reason," Paul says, "that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Paul's conversion is more than a historical event. It is a demonstration for every generation of what the grace of Christ can accomplish. If God's grace could transform Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle, then anyone who comes to Christ in true faith and repentance has no reason to despair. The foremost of sinners became the foremost of apostles. That is the gospel.

Paul cannot recount this grace without moving from explanation to praise. He cannot think about what God has done without breaking into worship, and in verse seventeen we see one of those moments in his letters where theological truth overflows into joyful doxology: "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Four attributes of God are highlighted in this brief doxology. He is the King of ages, sovereign over all time and history. He is immortal, untouched by decay or death. He is invisible, not seen by human eyes, and known only because He reveals Himself. He is the only God, the one ultimate reality, to whom all honor and glory in the universe rightly belong. Set against the greatness of God, the mercy shown to the chief of sinners is all the more astonishing.

The Charge Renewed (1:18–20)

Having established the apostolic authority behind this letter, clarified the nature of false teaching, and grounded his charge to Timothy in the solid rock of the gospel itself, Paul now brings the opening chapter to a close by renewing his personal charge to his young colleague. The language shifts into something more intimate, even as the content remains urgent.

Paul reminds Timothy of the earlier prophecies spoken over him, likely referring to the words given at his ordination when the elders laid hands on him and set him apart for gospel ministry. These words were not simply sentimental; they were the church's official recognition of God's calling on Timothy's life, affirmed by those entrusted with evaluating and confirming spiritual gifts in the congregation. Paul urges Timothy, "In accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, wage the good warfare." The calling already confirmed over Timothy's life is now being put to work for the urgent task ahead.

The metaphor of warfare is important. Warfare means there is an enemy, a front line, a strategy, and above all, a commitment to persist through hardship. The good warfare Timothy is called to is not about physical fighting, but about the long, difficult, spiritually demanding work of holding fast to the truth of the gospel and defending it against those who would distort it. "Holding faith and a good conscience" are the weapons for this battle, and they must go together. Faith without a good conscience becomes only intellectual agreement, disconnected from the integrity that true faith produces. A good conscience without living faith becomes empty moral self-satisfaction. Together, faith and a good conscience represent the integrated life of a minister who is truly equipped for this spiritual battle.

The consequences of abandoning either faith or a good conscience are evident in the sad examples of Hymenaeus and Alexander. Paul names them specifically, an unusual and deliberate move. By doing so, he signals to the congregation that their situation was public and could not be handled privately. They had rejected a good conscience and made a "shipwreck of their faith." Paul says he delivered them to Satan, referring to formal church discipline, the removal of the unrepentant from the church's fellowship. This action was not taken out of vengeance; Paul says the goal was for them to learn not to blaspheme. Properly administered, church discipline is an act of pastoral

concern. It is a last effort to bring a straying believer to repentance before the damage becomes permanent.

The image of a shipwreck deserves to be felt in all its seriousness. Ships do not usually sink in calm water and clear weather. They go down because of hidden rocks, unexpected storms, or dangers that remain unseen until it is too late. The faith of Hymenaeus and Alexander did not collapse all at once. Their downfall was gradual, marked by repeated decisions to ignore their conscience, to persist in what they knew was wrong, and to choose a false path over a true one. By the time their faith was shipwrecked, the damage had been building for a long time.

This warning is for every believer, not just ministers of the gospel. Conscience is a gift from God, a moral compass shaped by His Word. When it gives a warning, the right response is repentance and correction, not argument or stubbornness. Those who make a habit of ignoring conscience are not gaining spiritual freedom; they are destroying the very safeguard meant to keep them on course.

Study Questions

1. Paul says his apostleship came by command of God rather than by human appointment or personal choice. How does the divine origin of apostolic authority affect the way we should receive and respond to the teaching of Scripture?

2. The false teachers devoted themselves to myths and genealogies that produced speculation rather than godly faithfulness. What kind of teaching today tends to spark more debate than devotion? How can a congregation guard against it?

3. Paul says the goal of sound instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Consider each of these qualities individually. What does it look like for teaching to produce a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith in those who receive it?

4. The trustworthy saying in verse fifteen says Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and Paul calls himself the foremost. How does Paul's personal testimony function as a theological argument? What does it demonstrate about the gospel?

5. Paul distinguishes between the right use and the wrong use of the law of God. What is the right use, and how does understanding it help protect against both legalism and antinomianism?

6. Paul says Hymenaeus and Alexander rejected a good conscience and made a shipwreck of their faith. What practical disciplines help a believer keep the conscience sensitive, responsive to God, and resistant to the gradual erosion that leads to spiritual disaster?

Chapter Two: Prayer, Women, and the Worship of the Household of God (2:1–15)

The Priority of Congregational Prayer (2:1–2)

The shift from chapter one to chapter two is from the urgent, negative task of silencing false teachers to the equally important, positive task of directing the congregation in the way God intends. Paul has been dealing with what must stop. Now he turns to what must flourish. The first thing he addresses, before any other element of congregational life, is prayer. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people." The words first of all signal not merely a chronological sequence but a matter of priority. Among all the things that must characterize the life of the healthy congregation, prayer comes first.

Donald Guthrie, in his fine commentary on the Pastoral Letters, captures the intent precisely when he writes that the words "first of all" relate not to primacy of time but to primacy of importance. It is essential, at the outset, to ensure the noblest approach to public worship: prayer. The congregation that neglects prayer may maintain many of the forms of Christian life, such as its preaching, its fellowship, and its service to the community, but it has cut itself off from the very source of life from which all those activities draw their power. Prayer is not one element of congregational life among others. It is the air the congregation breathes.

Paul's choice to address prayer immediately after responding to the false teachers is not accidental. The false teachers had caused the church to become inwardly focused, drawing attention to myths and genealogies rather than to the broader reality of the gospel and its universal message. Prayer does the opposite. True prayer lifts the congregation's gaze beyond its own walls and concerns, turning it toward God, who rules over all, and toward the world for which He gave His Son. A congregation that prays is directed outward and upward in a way that speculation and narrow teaching never can achieve.

Four different words for prayer appear in verse one, and this variety is itself meaningful. Supplications are specific requests, brought to God for particular needs. Prayers is the broadest term, covering all kinds of communication with God. Intercessions are appeals made on behalf of others, the act of standing in the gap and presenting someone else's needs to God. Thanksgivings

are expressions of gratitude, recognizing God's past faithfulness and present generosity. The fact that all four words are plural may point to the involvement of many voices in the church's public prayer, and it certainly suggests that prayer in the assembly of Christ should be marked by variety, depth, and regularity, not reduced to a single brief request offered as a routine start to other activities.

All four types of prayer are meant to be offered for everyone. The repeated use of the word all in this passage stands out. Verse one mentions all people. Verse two refers to all who are in high positions. Verse four says God desires all people to be saved. Verse six declares that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all." This consistent focus on all serves as a direct response to the exclusiveness of the false teachers, who were preoccupied with their special knowledge and private discussions. The gospel is for everyone, and the prayers of the church should reflect the universal scope of God's saving purpose.

The specific instruction to pray for "kings and all who are in high positions" deserves particular attention, both because of the political context in which Paul wrote and because of the theological principle it embodies. When Paul wrote these words, Nero was the emperor of Rome. Nero was not merely an unbeliever. He was a man of extraordinary cruelty, a persecutor of Christians, and ultimately the ruler under whose authority Paul himself would be executed. Paul nonetheless says the church must pray for Nero. This is not political naivety. It reflects a profound theological conviction about the sovereignty of God over all human authority and about the church's responsibility to pray for the conditions in which the gospel can advance.

Paul explains that the reason for praying for civil authorities is so that "we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." This is not simply a prayer for personal comfort or an attempt to avoid engaging with society's challenges. Instead, it is a prayer rooted in the mission of the church. Social peace and stability allow the gospel to be shared freely, without unnecessary obstacles. The incident in Ephesus, where a riot forced Paul to leave and disrupted his ministry, vividly shows what can happen when order is lost. The church prays for good government, not out of naive trust in human power, but because it has a mission to carry out, and that mission flourishes best in an environment of social peace.

Guthrie again is helpful when he writes that the Christian attitude toward the state is of utmost importance. Whether the civil authorities are perverted or not, they must be made subjects of prayer, for Christian citizens may in this way influence the course of national affairs. This is a remarkable statement. Prayer for civil authorities is not passive resignation to whatever governments do. It is active intercession that has real effects in the world, because the God to whom that prayer is addressed is the God who rules over kings and nations and bends the course of history to His own purposes.

The Theological Foundation for Prayer (2:3–8)

Paul does not simply issue a command to pray broadly and leave it at that. He provides a theological foundation that explains why such prayer is both appropriate and effective. The foundation has two pillars, both of which are rooted in God's character and purposes.

The first pillar is simply this: such prayer is "good and pleasing to God our Savior." This is a more significant statement than it might initially appear. God is not indifferent to the prayers of His people or merely tolerant of them. He is pleased by them. When the congregation of Christ gathers to intercede for all people, including those in authority, it is doing something that aligns with the heart of God and that God Himself regards as good. The church does not need elaborate justifications for intercessory prayer. It does not need to demonstrate that its prayers are having measurable effects before it is willing to persist in them. It is enough to know that God is pleased.

The second pillar is deeply theological and profoundly important. God our Savior "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." This statement has sparked much discussion, especially within the Reformed tradition, and it deserves careful attention. It does not teach universalism, the idea that everyone will be saved regardless of their response to the gospel. Paul is clear elsewhere that not all will be saved, and the broader witness of Scripture to divine judgment supports this. Yet, the text still reveals something true and significant about God's character and desire.

The God whom Christians worship is not a God who is indifferent to the plight of the lost or who delights in the destruction of those who perish. He is a God whose character is love, whose nature is mercy, whose revealed desire is that all people "come to the knowledge of the truth." John Stott's suggestion that "all people here" means all groups of people, without distinction of race,

nationality, social status, or gender, is consistent with the context and helps explain the emphasis. The point against the false teachers' exclusiveness is that no category of humanity is excluded from the scope of God's saving purpose. The gospel is for everyone, and the church's prayer must reflect that universal scope.

The theological foundation Paul sets out in verses five and six is one of the most concise presentations of the gospel in the New Testament. Paul writes, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." The confession of one God is the cornerstone of Christian monotheism, inherited from Israel and defended against the surrounding culture's polytheism. Paul goes further still. He insists that there is only one mediator. There is no hierarchy of intermediaries, no succession of saints or priests through whom we must approach God, and no ladder of spiritual achievement that only the especially devout may climb. There is one mediator, and that is the man Christ Jesus.

This title, "the man Christ Jesus," is deeply significant. Paul is not denying Christ's divinity, which he strongly affirms in other writings. Instead, he is highlighting the humanity that makes Christ's mediation effective. A mediator must be able to represent both sides. Christ represents God to humanity, bringing the Father's full authority and grace. He also represents humanity to God, because He is truly and completely human, having taken on our nature in the incarnation. Christ's mediation is not a formality or a technicality. It is rooted in who He is: both fully God and fully man.

This mediator "gave himself as a ransom for all." The word ransom calls to mind the marketplace, where enslaved people were purchased and set free. It speaks of redemption, a rescue that comes at a cost, a liberation made possible not by the prisoner's effort but by another's payment. Christ gave Himself, not silver or gold or animal sacrifice, but his own life, his own body and blood, as the price for our freedom. This is the core of the gospel, and it is this good news that forms the foundation for the church's prayers for all people. Christ has opened the way of salvation for everyone, so the church can pray with confidence, trusting that God will bring people from every nation and background into that salvation.

Verse eight returns to the matter of men praying, specifically directing that men should pray, lifting holy hands in prayer without anger or quarreling." The posture of raised hands was common in ancient worship, Jewish and Gentile alike, as a gesture of openness toward and dependence upon God. Paul's concern is not the physical posture itself but the spiritual condition that must accompany it. Hands raised in prayer while the heart harbors unresolved anger against a brother is a contradiction, a form of spiritual dishonesty. The man who stands to lead the congregation in prayer must be at peace, as far as possible, with God and with the community he serves.

The Status and Conduct of Christian Women (2:9–15)

We now come to one of the most discussed, debated, and misunderstood passages in the entire New Testament. The verses that follow have generated a vast amount of commentary, with a wide range of interpretations and positions. It is important to note from the start that the intensity of the debate reveals something significant, not about the clarity of the text itself, which is actually much clearer than the controversy suggests, but about the cultural pressures that make it hard for many readers to hear the text without filtering it through assumptions shaped by the surrounding culture.

Three Guiding Principles

Before working through the passage verse by verse, three fundamental principles must be established because they determine the framework within which the specific instructions are correctly understood.

The first principle is foundational and cannot be compromised. Scripture makes it absolutely clear that men and women are equal in dignity, value, and spiritual standing before God. Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Any interpretation of this passage that lessens the dignity, worth, or spiritual status of women departs from the fundamental teaching of Scripture and should be rejected. The issue addressed here is not whether women are equal to men before God, because they are. The question is what roles God has given to men and women within the organized life of the congregation. These are separate issues, and confusing them has caused unnecessary endless debate.

The second principle involves the relationship between Scripture and culture. One of the most significant aspects of the modern conversation about women in ministry is its timing. It is historically notable that sustained, organized arguments from Scripture for the ordination of women did not gain widespread attention until the late 1960s, a period that coincided with the broader women's liberation movement in secular society. While this timing does not determine how Scripture should be interpreted, it does encourage us to consider whether changing a position the church has held for nearly two thousand years comes from a genuine new understanding of Scripture or from cultural influences. Paul warned the Romans not to be shaped by the world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. The pressure to fit in with the surrounding culture can shape how we interpret the Bible just as it can shape our actions.

The third principle is the internal consistency of Scripture. Every interpretation of any passage must agree with the teaching of the whole Bible. God's Word does not contradict itself. If a particular reading of a passage seems to conflict with other clear biblical teachings, it must be reconsidered. Any interpretation of First Timothy 2 that ends with women being encouraged to teach and exercise authority over men in the congregation must be weighed against the full biblical witness regarding male leadership, from the patriarchal structure of Israel, to the all-male group of apostles, to the consistent pattern of male eldership in Paul's churches. An interpretation that fits well with all this evidence is more likely to be correct than one that requires these patterns to be explained away.

A Woman's Dress and Demeanor (2:9–10)

The word "likewise" at the beginning of verse nine connects what follows to the previous instruction about men in verse eight. Just as men are to pray with holy hands, free from anger and quarreling, women are to present themselves in the worship assembly with modesty, self-control, and a focus on inner rather than outer beauty. Paul points out that the main temptation for men is anger and quarreling, while for women, at least in that cultural context, it was an excessive and competitive concern with outward appearance.

Paul writes, "Let women adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness, with good works." It would be easy to interpret this as a rule about hairstyles

and jewelry, but that would miss the main point. The word "respectable" is the same word Paul uses in chapter three as a qualification for overseers. It refers not to a specific style of dress, but to a dignity and appropriateness of character that reflects a life genuinely shaped by the gospel.

The references to braided hair, gold, and pearls require some cultural context for proper understanding. In the first-century Roman world, elaborate hairstyles were a way of displaying wealth and social status. Women would use jeweled combs made of tortoise shell and pins of ivory, silver, or bronze with jeweled heads to fasten their braids. For wealthy women, styling hair was a time-consuming process that required the help of servants. When Christian women came to worship adorned in this way, they brought the surrounding culture's status competition and social display into the household of God, which did not fit with the character of the gospel.

Paul is not insisting that women must wear plain clothing or avoid all jewelry, nor is he making a statement about fashion itself. He is addressing the attitude of the heart that uses outward appearance to signal status, seek attention, or compete with other women in the congregation. The Christian woman is called to adorn herself with what is proper for those who profess godliness. The kind of adornment God values is internal, not external; it is not about displaying wealth, but about displaying grace; not about announcing social status, but about showing a life genuinely devoted to Christ and to serving others.

The Apostle Peter echoes this in his first letter, urging women to let their adorning be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. This is the standard, and it is not one that diminishes women. Rather, it honors them by pointing to the beauty that is truly theirs as women made new in Christ Jesus. Proverbs 31:30 says it plainly: "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

The reference to "good works" as the proper adornment of godly women is the first of many instances of this phrase in the Pastoral Epistles. Good works become a key theme in these letters, appearing repeatedly as the expected and necessary evidence of genuine faith. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in. For women, as for men, the life of faith should be marked by visible

signs of grace, such as concrete acts of service, hospitality, care for those in need, and faithfulness in every area of responsibility God has given.

A Woman's Behavior in the Assembly (2:11–14)

Verse eleven opens with a positive instruction that is easily overlooked in the focus on what follows: "let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness." The command to learn is significant. In the Jewish world of the first century, the systematic instruction of women in the Scriptures was not a universal practice. Synagogue education was primarily directed at men. Paul's instruction that women must learn is, therefore, itself a statement of their full dignity and spiritual standing. The church has a responsibility to teach its women well, to provide them with sound biblical instruction, and to ensure they are not left ignorant of the Word of God.

"I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." These two prohibitions have generated intense discussion, much of it centered on the exact meaning of the phrase translated as "exercise authority." The Greek word used here for "exercise authority" appears only in this passage in the New Testament, which has led some scholars to suggest it carries a negative meaning, such as usurping authority or dominating. If that were the case, Paul would be prohibiting only an illegitimate or self-asserting kind of authority.

However, careful research by scholars such as Douglas Moo and Thomas Schreiner, who have studied the use of this word throughout ancient Greek literature, shows that it most often carries a positive or neutral sense: to have authority or to be in charge. There is no solid evidence from Greek texts of that period indicating that the word is inherently negative. The most straightforward reading, then, is that Paul is restricting women from holding the teaching office in the congregation in a way that puts them in authority over men. This has been the historic view of the church from the time the letter was written until the modern era.

The crucial issue, as every careful reader of this passage recognizes, is the basis for Paul's instruction. If it were grounded in the particular cultural circumstances of first-century Ephesus, one would expect him to appeal to those circumstances. He does not. He grounds it instead in the creation account of Genesis, in the very beginning of human history, before sin entered the world. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. The priority of Adam's creation is presented as the theological basis for the distinction in roles within the assembly. This is not a cultural

accommodation. It is a creation order established by God before the fall, rooted in how God structured human life at the very beginning. Precisely because it is rooted in creation rather than culture, it carries normative weight for the church in every age and every cultural context.

The second argument from creation history in verse fourteen adds another dimension. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. This has sometimes been misread as a claim that women are inherently more susceptible to deception than men, which would be both theologically problematic and empirically false. The point is more subtle and more interesting. When the created order was reversed in the garden, with the woman taking the lead and the man following rather than exercising the leadership and responsibility assigned to him, the consequences were catastrophic for the entire human race. The order God established at creation was not arbitrary. It was designed for the flourishing of both men and women, and when it was disrupted, everything went wrong. Paul's instruction to the Ephesian congregation is, in part, a protection of the congregation from repeating that disastrous pattern.

A Woman's Salvation (2:15)

Verse fifteen is widely acknowledged to be one of the most difficult sentences in the entire Pastoral Epistles. "Yet she will be saved through childbearing–if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." Two things can be stated with confidence from the start. First, Paul is not teaching that women earn their salvation through bearing children. This would contradict the entire message of the gospel, which insists that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, and it would set this verse in direct contradiction with the consistent teaching of Paul across all his letters. Whatever the verse means, it cannot mean that.

Second, the shift from the singular she to the plural they is not a grammatical accident but a deliberate signal. The "she" in the first part of the verse most naturally refers to Eve, or perhaps to the woman in verse fourteen who became a transgressor. The "they" who must continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control are the women of the Ephesian congregation, the women to whom this letter is ultimately addressed.

The interpretation that has perhaps the most to commend it theologically understands the childbearing as a reference to the birth of the Messiah, the childbearing through which salvation came into the world. On this reading, the verse is saying that women, despite the transgression of

Eve, are saved through the event to which all of Eve's childbearing pointed: the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The serpent had spoken to the woman, and the woman had fallen. God had already promised in Genesis 3:15, however, that through the offspring of the woman the serpent's head would be crushed. That promise was fulfilled in the birth, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is through Him, the one born of woman, that women and men alike are saved.

A second interpretation understands the verse as an affirmation that godly women will be preserved and will find their flourishing in the sphere of life to which God has called them, including the bearing and raising of children, provided they continue in the Christian virtues of faith, love, holiness, and self-control. On this reading, Paul is saying that the restriction he has placed on women in the teaching office does not diminish them or deprive them of a meaningful calling. They have a calling that is honored by God, that bears genuine spiritual fruit, and that will prove to be a path of grace and flourishing for those who walk it faithfully.

Both interpretations acknowledge the same fundamental reality: the instructions Paul has given concerning women in the worship assembly do not represent a judgment against women or a denial of their spiritual significance. They represent a divine ordering of the congregation's life that, when embraced in faith, leads to the flourishing of women and men, and of the congregation as a whole. God's order is always for our good, even when it runs counter to our cultural assumptions.

Study Questions

1. Paul says that prayer for all people is good and pleasing to God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved. What does this tell us about the scope and motivation of the church's intercessory prayer? How broadly should the church's prayers range?
2. Paul identifies four kinds of prayer: supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings. Reflect on the prayer life of your congregation. Which of these four tends to receive the most emphasis? Which is the least? What might a more balanced approach look like?
3. Paul grounds the instruction for congregational prayer for civil leaders in the goal of a peaceful and quiet life that allows the gospel to advance. How does thinking of prayer for the government as a missiological act change your approach to it?
4. The three guiding principles for reading the passage on women are: equal dignity by creation and redemption, Scripture as the authoritative guide over culture, and consistency with the whole of Scripture. How does each of these principles help navigate the most contested parts of this passage?
5. Paul grounds his instruction about women in the teaching office in the creation order rather than in the cultural circumstances at Ephesus. What are the implications of this creational grounding for how the church should respond when cultural pressure pushes for a different arrangement?
6. Paul begins verse eleven with the positive command that women must learn. What does this tell us about the church's responsibility to provide serious biblical instruction for women? What does a congregation that takes this seriously look like in practice?

Chapter Three: The Qualifications for Leadership in the Household of God (3:1–16)

A Noble Task (3:1)

The second of Paul's "trustworthy sayings" in this letter is brief but significant: "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." In a letter that has devoted considerable attention to addressing the harm caused by unqualified and ungodly teachers, this affirmation of the value and dignity of the pastoral office stands out. Paul does not respond to the problems caused by false teachers with hesitation about leadership. Instead, he boldly states that the office of overseer, when filled by a qualified man, is one of the highest callings available.

The word "aspires" translates a Greek term meaning to stretch toward something, to reach for it with real desire and effort. Paul is not talking about a passing interest in ministry or a vague idea of serving one day. He is describing a true aspiration, a steady longing that leads to real effort and honest self-examination. Paul's verdict on this desire is clear: it is a desire for a noble task. The church should not be suspicious of men who feel a genuine call to preach, teach, and lead God's people. Such a call, when it is real, is a gift of grace.

Of course, there is a kind of desire for ministry that is not a call but an ambition, a desire for status rather than service, for influence rather than the self-giving required of Christ's servants. Paul does not commend this kind of ambition, and the qualifications he soon outlines will make it clear that such motives disqualify, not qualify, a person for leadership. The aspiration Paul encourages is that of a man who truly loves the gospel, loves God's people, and earnestly wants to devote his life to their flourishing under Christ's Word. That desire is noble and should be encouraged.

The continuity from chapter two to chapter three is important to recognize. The topic has not changed dramatically. Paul is still focused on proper conduct within the household of God. After addressing congregational prayer and the roles of men and women in the assembly, he now discusses the qualifications for those who lead and care for the congregation. The concern about false teachers, present from the start of the letter, remains in view. When Paul describes the qualifications for an overseer, he is also showing how completely unqualified the false teachers in Ephesus truly were. The portrait of a godly elder is, in a sense, the opposite of the false teacher.

Two Offices in the Church (3:1–13)

Before examining the specific qualifications Paul sets out, it is important to clearly establish which offices the New Testament actually recognizes. The answer is straightforward: two. The congregation of Jesus Christ is to be served by overseers, also called elders or pastors, and by deacons. This is stated plainly in Philippians 1:1, where Paul addresses his letter "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons." The simplicity and clarity of this structure stand in marked contrast to the elaborately tiered hierarchies that various branches of the church have constructed over the centuries.

Roman Catholicism, for example, has developed a whole pyramid of offices: Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, and the laity. However ancient these structures may be in church history, they do not come from the New Testament pattern. The Church of England, with its archbishops and archdeacons, and many Protestant denominations with their layers of regional and national oversight, all add to the basic biblical structure in ways that require justification from sources outside the New Testament. This is not to say that all forms of denominational organization are necessarily wrong or harmful. It is simply to say that the New Testament norm is straightforward: elders and deacons serving a congregation of believers.

Three introductory observations about these offices can help frame the specific qualifications that follow. First, establishing godly leadership in the early church was not an afterthought. It was one of the first and most urgent priorities. Acts 14:21–23 records that when Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches they had founded during the first missionary journey, in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting. Not in some churches, but in every church. The health of the congregation is closely tied to the health of its leadership, and Paul understood this clearly. It shaped every part of his missionary strategy.

Second, the role of the elder is defined primarily by two main responsibilities that must remain united: loving rule and loving teaching. Every elder must be "able to teach," as the qualifications make clear, even though some will be more gifted in public teaching and preaching than others. First Timothy 5:17 points to this distinction by describing those who labor in preaching and teaching as especially worthy of double honor. This suggests that within the eldership, some may focus more on pastoral care and administration, while others focus more on preaching and teaching

the Word. Still, all elders must be able to teach. Teaching God's Word is not a specialized task for just a few particularly talented elders. It is a core duty of the office itself.

Third, the New Testament uses the terms elder, overseer, bishop, pastor, and shepherd interchangeably, a fact supported by clear textual evidence. In Acts 20:17, Paul calls for the "elders" of the Ephesian church. In verse 28, he tells these same men that the Holy Spirit has made them "overseers" and instructs them to "shepherd" God's flock. Three terms are used to refer to the same group of men and the same office. In Titus 1:5, Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town, and two verses later, he refers to the qualifications of a bishop or overseer, making it clear that he is still speaking of the same role. The term elder highlights the dignity and maturity required for the position. The term overseer or bishop focuses on the responsibility to care for and supervise the congregation. The term pastor or shepherd emphasizes the relational and nurturing aspects of the ministry. These are not three separate offices but three ways of describing one office from different perspectives.

The Qualifications for Overseers (3:2–7)

The qualification list for overseers begins with a summary statement that serves as the foundation for all the others: "above reproach." An elder must be a man against whom no legitimate accusation can be brought. He should not be open to just criticism or blame. This does not mean he must be sinless, which no one can achieve in this life. Rather, it means he must have a life marked by consistent integrity, so that he does not give opponents of the gospel any grounds for attacking the church.

The next qualification is that he must be the "husband of one wife." This phrase, literally "a one-woman man" in Greek, has been interpreted in various ways. The most straightforward reading is that it requires faithful, exclusive devotion to one's wife. It speaks to the elder's pattern of marital faithfulness, calling for the single-minded commitment often missing in the surrounding culture. Whether this phrase prohibits remarriage after a spouse's death or in the case of a legitimate divorce remains debated among scholars, and the phrase itself does not resolve the question. What is clear is that the elder's relationship with his wife must be above reproach, marked by the exclusive, wholehearted commitment that marriage was always meant to display.

"Sober-minded" means being clear-headed and exercising sound judgment, rather than being prone to excess or impulsiveness that clouds rational thinking. It is the ability to remain thoughtful and composed under pressure, to evaluate situations without being overtaken by emotion, and to keep perspective when others might lose theirs. This quality is essential for a man who will need to make difficult pastoral decisions, handle conflict within the congregation, and discern truth in teaching and teachers.

"Self-controlled" is closely related to sober-minded. It appears often in the Pastoral Epistles as a key virtue for leaders and for all believers. The Greek word refers to having mastery over one's desires and impulses, the ability to govern the inner life instead of being ruled by it. An elder who cannot govern himself is not fit to lead the household of God. This qualification excludes not only obvious failures like drunkenness or sexual immorality, but also subtler issues: an elder who cannot control his tongue, manage his anger, discipline his reading and study habits, keep confidences, or maintain healthy boundaries.

"Respectable" translates the same Greek word used in chapter two for the kind of dignified and appropriate conduct expected of Christian women in the assembly. When applied to the elder, it describes behavior that naturally earns respect, not by demanding it, but by carrying oneself in a way that inspires confidence and trust. This is different from charisma or natural charm, which can exist without real character. In Paul's view, respectability is the result of consistent and genuine integrity shown over time.

"Hospitable" is a qualification that is sometimes overlooked when discussing this list. In the ancient world, hospitality meant opening one's home to strangers and sharing resources with guests. With no hotels available, hospitality could be a matter of survival for travelers, and the Christian community relied on it for the movement of missionaries, the gathering of congregations, and care for those in need. For an elder, being hospitable means that his home is open, his table is accessible, and both the people of God and strangers feel welcome there. A man who keeps his home closed and prioritizes his own comfort and privacy at the expense of others is not qualified by this standard alone.

"Able to teach" is the one qualification in this list that specifically concerns the function of the office rather than just the character of the man. In Titus, this is expanded to holding firmly to the

trustworthy word as taught, so that he may instruct in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it. The ability to teach requires both a firm grasp of sound doctrine and the courage to apply it, both in teaching and correction. An elder who can warmly present the gospel but cannot rebuke error has only part of the qualification. Likewise, an elder who rebukes with zeal but cannot nourish with sound instruction is also incomplete. Both are vital to his ministry.

The qualifications "not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" address similar concerns from different angles. A minister of Christ must not let his judgment or conduct be impaired by excessive drinking. This does not require total abstinence, since Paul even advises Timothy to take a little wine for his health, but it does mean avoiding habitual overindulgence that clouds judgment and harms one's witness. The phrase "not violent but gentle" speaks to the way an elder manages conflict and confrontation. An elder who intimidates, bullies, or reacts to disagreement with aggression is not suitable for leadership. Gentleness is not weakness; it is strength under control. It means using authority responsibly, correcting without harming others, and leading without overpowering

"Not a lover of money" is a qualification that holds great importance in the Pastoral Epistles. Paul will revisit the danger of loving money in chapter six, using some of the most sobering language in all of Scripture. An elder who is driven by financial gain, who uses his position to advance his own material interests, or who makes decisions based on personal financial benefit rather than the spiritual well-being of the congregation, has undermined the very purpose of the office. The ministry of the gospel is not an ordinary career. It is a calling from the living. God, and a heart that follows this calling seeks the good of others, not personal profit.

"He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive with all dignity," Paul asks, "if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" The reasoning is clear and compelling. The family is the training ground for leadership. A man who leads his home well, maintaining loving authority that his children respect and his wife trusts, has shown in the most intimate and challenging environment that he can be trusted with greater responsibility in the church. A man who cannot lead his family gives no reason to believe he can lead the people of God.

Paul does not require perfect children. He does not mean flawlessly obedient adults who never struggle or wander. The qualification concerns the household pattern during the years when the children are being raised. It is about having a kind of loving, dignified, and consistent leadership that produces children who respect parental authority, even if they do not always agree. Adult children who have rejected the faith do not automatically disqualify a father who has genuinely and faithfully raised them in the Word of God. However, a home characterized by ongoing disorder, disrespect, and a loss of parental authority sends a clear signal about a man's fitness for church leadership.

"Not a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." The main concern here is not theological knowledge. A gifted new believer might gain a solid understanding of sound doctrine fairly quickly. The concern is about a character that has been tested and matured over time. Pride is a dangerous temptation for anyone in a position of authority, and it is especially risky for someone who is newly converted or newly prominent. An elder who has served the congregation for years as an ordinary member has had his pride tested again and again. He has experienced failure, repentance, and growth. He knows enough about the Christian life to realize he is not its best example. That kind of humility is itself a qualification for leadership.

"Well thought of by outsiders." The elder's reputation must reach beyond the church he serves. He is also a member of the wider community, a neighbor, a colleague, and a citizen. His behavior in these roles shapes how the larger community views both the church he leads and the Christ the church proclaims. An elder known for integrity, honest dealings, and sincere care for others opens doors for the gospel. On the other hand, an elder with a poor reputation outside the church gives the devil the foothold that Paul warns against.

The Office of Deacon (3:8–13)

The qualifications for deacons are notably similar to those for elders, and this similarity is itself instructive. The character qualities that Paul requires for effective service in the church do not vary significantly with the office one holds. Both elders and deacons must be men of dignity and integrity, tested and proven, managing their households and children well. The differences in the lists reflect the differences in function rather than differences in the level of character required.

The word deacon comes from the Greek term for servant or minister. It refers to those who serve the congregation's practical needs, allowing the elders to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. The classic New Testament example for understanding the diaconate is found in Acts 6:1–7. In this passage, the Jerusalem church was growing, and the Hellenistic Jewish widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles realized they could not adequately care for both the ministry of the Word and the congregation's practical needs. They asked the church to choose seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, to oversee the distribution. This solution addressed both needs: the practical care was provided, and the apostles were able to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. As a result, the word of God spread, and the number of disciples increased significantly.

The deacons in the congregation of Christ are not a lower level of leadership or simply people who do tasks the elders do not want to do. They are men called to a specific and vital ministry: providing practical service to the congregation in ways that support the ministry of the Word. Without faithful deacons caring for the church's physical and administrative needs, elders would find their time and energy consumed by responsibilities that should not be their primary focus. The work of deacons enables elders to do their work, and together these two offices help advance the gospel.

The deacon "must be dignified," showing the same kind of appropriate and trustworthy conduct that is required of elders. He must not be "double-tongued," meaning he should not say different things to different people to suit his own advantage. His word must be reliable. He must not be addicted to much wine, reflecting the same concern for sobriety seen in the elder's qualifications. He must not be greedy for dishonest gain, which is especially important for someone handling the congregation's practical and financial resources. He "must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience," meaning his practical service should flow from a genuine and deeply held faith, not just from social involvement or loyalty to the institution.

Verse eleven mentions women, and the translation here is genuinely debated. The Greek word can mean "wives," referring to deacons' wives, or "women," potentially referring to female deacons or deaconesses. Both readings are possible, and careful scholars have taken both positions. The qualities required for these women are "dignified, not slanderers, sober-minded, and faithful in all things.' These qualities fit what would be expected of either deacons' wives or women serving the body of Christ. Whatever the interpretation, the qualities Paul describes are clear and important.

The concluding promise of verse thirteen is one of the most encouraging statements in the chapter. “For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” Good standing is the respect and trust that faithful service earns within the Body of Christ. Great confidence in the faith is the growing boldness that arises from a life of steady, faithful service, from witnessing God’s grace at work in the congregation, and from the deepening experience of giving oneself in service to others for the love of Christ. God does not measure significance the way the world does. A deacon who has faithfully served his congregation for twenty years, managing the building, caring for the poor, visiting the sick, and attending to practical needs that others overlook, has gained something priceless: the standing and confidence of someone found faithful.

The Heart of the Letter (3:14–16)

The section that follows is the theological center of the entire letter, the hinge on which everything turns. Paul pauses in his practical instructions to state clearly the purpose behind all he has written and all he is about to write. He says, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”

The phrase “the household of God” has appeared earlier in the letter, but here it takes on its full theological meaning. The church is not simply a voluntary group of like-minded people, a social club for the religious, or an institution created by humans for human purposes. It is the “household of God,” the community over which the living God Himself presides as head, master, and sustainer. This means that the way of life within the church is not negotiable as it would be in a human organization. It is ordered by the character and will of the One who owns the house.

The church is also called the “pillar and buttress of the truth.” These are images taken from the great temple architecture of the ancient world. A pillar supports a structure, holding up its weight and displaying its beauty. A buttress strengthens a wall, protecting it from outside forces. The church does not invent or create the truth. It has received the gospel as a gift and has been given the responsibility to hold it up before the world, to display it, to protect it from corruption, and to proclaim it to those who have not heard. When the church does not fulfill this role, it abandons its most basic reason for existing.

The chapter ends with what appears to be an early Christian hymn, offering a concise summary of the gospel's main events in six powerful phrases. "He was manifested in the flesh." The eternal Son of God took on human nature, becoming fully and truly human without ceasing to be fully and truly God. "Vindicated by the Spirit." The resurrection, accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, declared with certainty that Jesus is the Son of God and that his atoning work was accepted. "Seen by angels." Angels witnessed the great events of redemption: the birth, the resurrection, and the ascension, thereby showing the significance of what was accomplished. "Proclaimed among the nations." The gospel is not a private message for one group, but the universal good news now spreading to the ends of the earth. "Believed on in the world." The result of this proclamation is faith: real human faith in a real human Jesus, found among the nations. Taken up in glory. This refers to the ascension of the risen Christ to the right hand of the Father, from where he will one day return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

This is the truth that the church is charged with upholding and proclaiming. This is the mystery of godliness, the great secret that has been revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything Paul has said about prayer, the role of women, the qualifications of leaders, and the care of widows exists in service of this truth and of the community of believers that exists to hold it up before the world. The household of God has been given a treasure beyond all imagining, and its fundamental task is to guard it, display it, and share it with all.

Study Questions

1. Paul says that the aspiration to serve as an overseer is a desire for a noble task. How should the church encourage men toward pastoral ministry? What might discourage men from pursuing such a calling, and how can those discouragements be addressed?

2. The first and most comprehensive qualification for the overseer is above reproach. What does a life above reproach actually look like? How does a congregation evaluate whether a man meets this standard?

3. Paul requires that an elder manage his own household well before being entrusted with the household of God. What specific things in a man's family life does this qualification call for evaluation? Are there situations in which this qualification might be difficult to apply?

4. The ability to teach is described in Titus as holding firm to the trustworthy word so as to give instruction in sound doctrine and to rebuke those who contradict it. What does this dual requirement, instruction and rebuke, demand of the elder in terms of both knowledge and courage?

5. Acts 6 shows that the appointment of men to handle practical ministry freed the apostles for prayer and the Word, resulting in the advance of the gospel. What does this pattern suggest about the proper relationship between the elders and the deacons in a healthy congregation?

6. Paul calls the church the pillar and buttress of the truth. What concrete commitments and practices does this description demand of a congregation? What threatens a church's ability to fulfill this calling?

Chapter Four: False Teaching and the Character of the True Minister (4:1–16)

The Prediction and the Reality (4:1–3a)

The transition from the end of chapter three to the beginning of chapter four is one of the most striking in the letter. Chapter three ends with a lofty confession, a hymn summarizing the gospel from incarnation to ascension. Chapter four opens with Paul bringing the reader back to reality through a sudden shift in tone. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith.”

The word that opens this verse, translated as “now,” “but,” or “however” in different English versions, acts as a bridge between the uplifting hymn at the end of chapter three and the serious warning at the start of chapter four. After the church proclaims its faith with confidence, the tone shifts dramatically. The Spirit makes it clear that some people will turn away from the very faith they have just confessed. This is not a contrast between a perfect past and a corrupted future. Instead, it highlights the ongoing tension between the truth God has revealed and the reality that some will always be tempted to stray from it, a pattern that continues throughout the entire church age.

The phrase “later times” is important to understand in its New Testament context. In Scripture, “the last days” or “later times” do not refer only to a period just before the return of Christ. Instead, they describe the entire era between Christ’s first and second comings. This age began with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and will continue until Christ appears again. Peter makes this clear in his Pentecost sermon, as recorded in Acts 2:17, when he quotes the prophecy from Joel 2:28, “in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,” and identifies the events of that day as its fulfillment. The writer of Hebrews also begins his letter by saying, “In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son.”

The last days, then, are the days the church has lived in since its very beginning. This means that Paul’s warning about false teachers is not about a distant future that Timothy need not worry about. It is a warning about the church’s present reality in every age, including Timothy’s own time in Ephesus. The Holy Spirit is saying clearly and without ambiguity that this departure from the faith is already underway. The warning Paul gave to the Ephesian elders years earlier, that “from among

their own number men would arise speaking twisted things" (Acts 20:30), was not a mere theory. It was a prophecy that had come true.

The word apostasy, which comes from the Greek word Paul uses for "depart," deserves special attention. It refers to a *process of leaving or moving away* from something once held or professed. Apostasy is not always a sudden, dramatic rejection. It can be gradual and incremental, a series of small steps in the wrong direction that eventually result in a complete departure from the truth. The false teachers in Ephesus did not simply announce one day that they were rejecting apostolic Christianity. Their departure was almost certainly a process, marked by small compromises, the gradual erosion of conscience that Paul has already described, and a series of choices that each seemed manageable but together had a disastrous effect.

The Nature of False Teaching in Ephesus (4:1b–5)

What exactly were the false teachers in Ephesus promoting? Paul gives two clear examples: they were forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods. These prohibitions are striking, and they share a common nature. Both marriage and the enjoyment of food are among the most basic gifts God gave to humanity at creation. Marriage was established in the Garden of Eden before the fall, declared good by God, and given as the foundational human relationship in which the deepest intimacy and partnership are to be experienced. Food is also a gift from the Creator, who made a world full of good things to eat and pronounced it all very good.

When the false teachers declared marriage forbidden and required abstinence from certain foods as a path to holiness, they were, regardless of their intentions, directly contradicting the Creator. Their teaching suggested that the material gifts God had declared good were actually spiritually dangerous, and that holiness meant avoiding rather than rightly using what God had made. This is a distortion of creation theology. Paul responds by grounding his answer in that theology: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."

The false teaching at Ephesus foreshadowed what would later develop more fully in the second-century movement known as Gnosticism. The Gnostic worldview generally identified matter as evil or at least inferior. In this view, the material world was the product of an inferior or even hostile deity, and spiritual progress meant escaping the bonds of material existence. Marriage, with its physical intimacy, and food, with its bodily pleasure, were seen as obstacles to true spirituality

and were to be renounced by those seeking spiritual advancement. For the Gnostics, salvation did not come through knowing God as revealed in Scripture, but through secret knowledge of the true nature of reality, available only to those few initiated into their mysteries.

Paul's response is both theological and pastoral. Theologically, he goes back to Genesis: everything God created is good. This is the repeated refrain of Genesis 1, where God looks at what he has made and calls it good, good, good, and finally very good. Creation is not a prison to escape from, but a gift to be received with thanksgiving and used wisely. The right response to God's good gifts is not to reject them through strict self-denial, but to receive them with gratitude, accompanied by prayer and praise that acknowledge God as the giver, and guided by the word of God, which teaches us how to use his gifts rightly.

Pastorally, Paul's instruction remains important today. There is a common temptation in Christian practice to adopt a form of self-denial that goes beyond what Scripture actually requires, treating ordinary pleasures and needs as spiritually suspicious and imagining that holiness means making life uncomfortable and joyless. This is not the true discipline of Christian self-control, which has its place, but a distortion that denies the goodness of creation. The believer who gratefully receives marriage, enjoys food with thanksgiving, and delights in the beauty of the natural world while honoring the God who made it is living more faithfully than the believer who rigidly denies himself these gifts, wrongly thinking that God is pleased by his discomfort.

The Origins of False Teaching (4:1b, 2)

Paul identifies two dimensions of the origin of false teaching in the Ephesian context, both of which merit careful attention. The first is theological: these teachers are "devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons." The second is moral, as they demonstrate the "insincerity of liars whose consciences have been seared."

The theological claim that false teaching originates in demonic activity is not popular in contemporary culture, even within the church, but it must not be dismissed or softened. Paul is not using this language as a metaphor for bad ideas. He is making a claim about the spiritual reality behind the false teaching that had taken root in Ephesus. The Lord Jesus Himself identified the devil as the "father of lies," the one who has been a murderer from the beginning and who does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When human beings teach what contradicts

the truth of God, they are, however unwittingly, in some cases, serving the purposes of the one whose agenda is always the distortion of truth and the destruction of souls.

This does not mean that every false teacher is consciously working for the devil. It means that the spiritual environment in which false teaching thrives has been shaped by demonic influence, and that ideas leading people away from the truth of the gospel serve the devil's purposes, regardless of the teachers' intentions. It also means that the struggle against false teaching is not just an intellectual matter, solved by better arguments and clearer interpretation, though those are important. It is a spiritual battle that requires prayer, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and watchfulness to recognize the enemy's strategies, even when they appear as sincere religious concern.

The moral aspect of this is just as serious. Paul describes these teachers as insincere liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. The Greek word for "seared" is where we get our English word "cauterize," the process of using intense heat to close a wound and stop bleeding. A cauterized wound is sealed so that nothing can enter or leave. Paul uses this medical image to describe a conscience that has been burned into insensitivity by repeated sin and lack of repentance. This is a conscience that no longer feels the Holy Spirit's conviction, no longer responds to God's Word, and no longer provides the internal warning that helps keep someone on the path of truth.

This condition does not appear all at once. It is the result of a process that Paul elsewhere in the letter describes as a shipwreck of the faith. A person begins with a conscience that responds to truth and to the voice of God. When they encounter something that conflicts with their desires, they may choose to argue with their conscience rather than repent. If they persist in doing what they know is wrong and ignore warnings, the conscience gradually becomes less sensitive and less responsive. Eventually, it no longer registers concerns it once would have sounded an alarm about. This is what it means to have a seared conscience, and it is a dangerous place to be.

The practical implication for ordinary believers should be obvious. Conscience is a gift from God and must be protected. Someone who makes a habit of listening to their conscience, repenting when it speaks, and aligning their life with what they know to be true will find that their conscience becomes more sensitive over time. Someone who regularly ignores their conscience will find the

opposite. It is vital to understand that keeping the conscience intact is not a minor detail of personal devotion. It is essential for assurance and spiritual survival.

Guarding Against False Teaching (4:3b–5)

After describing the nature and origins of false teaching, Paul explains how a faithful minister can guard against it. The answer is both straightforward and demanding. A minister must know the truth of the Word of God and live it. At the end of verse three, Paul explains that those who believe and know the truth are best equipped to recognize and resist what is false. A minister who is deeply shaped by the Word of God, has internalized sound doctrine, and has a heart and mind formed by the gospel is far better prepared to detect and resist error than one who relies on gut feeling, tradition, or others' opinions.

John Calvin, in his sermons on First Timothy, captures the urgency of this point well. He writes that the true remedy for remaining obedient to God is to focus on what is contained in God's Word. We are to stand firmly on it, and those who preach the gospel must faithfully declare God's message, urging believers to submit to Jesus Christ and not stray from the narrow path of salvation. A minister who depends on anything other than the Word of God as his main anchor will lack the stability he needs when challenges arise.

Sound Teaching and Godliness (4:6–10)

Verse six marks an important shift in the chapter. Paul moves from describing false teachers and their teaching to describing Timothy as a "good servant of Christ Jesus." The contrast is clear at every point. While the false teachers devote themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings that lead people astray, Timothy is to devote himself to the words of the faith and the good doctrine he has followed. Where the false teachers have seared consciences, Timothy is to maintain the good conscience Paul has commended throughout the letter. The rest of the chapter continues to develop this contrast.

Paul writes, "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed." The word translated as "being trained" is the same word behind "discipline" in verse seven, connecting Timothy's teaching ministry to his own personal spiritual development. The minister who puts the truths of the gospel before the people of God is also being trained and shaped by those truths himself. Teaching sound doctrine requires the teacher to live in it, to be shaped by it, and to let it

form his character. Teaching and personal formation are not separate activities; they are deeply connected parts of the same life of discipleship.

“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.” The word translated “silly” shares the same root as the English word “profane,” but here it means worldly or godless, referring to things that belong to the old, unredeemed way of life. The myths and endless genealogies promoted by the false teachers were not merely intellectually incorrect; they were spiritually harmful. They drew minds and hearts away from the clear, life-giving truth of the gospel and into empty speculation. Timothy is told to refuse to engage with them, not because they are too difficult to answer, but because they are not worth his time.

Instead, Paul urges his beloved friend, “train yourself for godliness.” The comparison that follows is one of Paul’s most memorable images: “bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Athletic training was a familiar concept in the ancient world, and Paul’s readers would have understood the image immediately. An athlete who wants to excel submits to strict discipline, denies himself certain pleasures, endures discomfort, and follows a sustained development program. Paul uses this image to describe the spiritual life. Training for godliness is at least as demanding as physical training, and its rewards are far greater. Physical exercise brings benefits that last only a lifetime. Training in godliness brings benefits that last into eternity.

Timothy as Model of the Faithful Teacher (4:11–16)

The chapter ends with a series of direct commands to Timothy, giving one of the clearest pictures of pastoral faithfulness in the New Testament. Paul tells him, “Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”

The instruction not to let anyone despise him for his youth is paired with the call to set an example, and together they reveal Paul’s strategy. Timothy cannot stop people from initially questioning his authority because of his age. What he can do is live in a way that makes such doubts impossible to maintain. If the congregation sees their pastor’s speech marked by truth and grace, his conduct marked by integrity, his love patient and sincere, his faith steady, and his purity unquestioned, then

they have no valid reason to dismiss him because he is young. Character is the answer to the challenge of youth and, in the end, to every challenge in pastoral leadership.

The five areas in which Timothy is to set an example deserve careful attention. Speech includes everything from the pulpit to one-on-one pastoral conversations to casual remarks after worship. The minister's words are always noticed, always evaluated, and always carry the weight of his office. Conduct refers to the whole range of visible behavior. This would include the way the minister handles money, treats his family, responds to criticism, and behaves even when he thinks no one is watching. Love is the core orientation of the pastoral heart, showing genuine care for the souls entrusted to him and motivating all his actions. Faith is the foundation of the ministry, the minister's personal trust in God, which communicates itself to the congregation in ways that no sermon could fully express. Purity includes both sexual integrity and the kind of undivided heart that is not chasing hidden agendas or keeping secret compromises.

Paul also tells Timothy to devote himself to three activities: "the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching." Together, these describe the pattern of faithful worship in the early church and, by extension, in every faithful congregation since. The public reading of Scripture is foundational: it is God's Word read aloud to the assembled people. In a time when most believers did not have their own copy of the Scriptures, this was often their main access to God's Word. Exhortation applies the Word to the conscience and will, urging hearers to respond to its demands and promises. Teaching gives the doctrinal framework that helps the congregation understand the Scriptures and grounds the exhortation. Without the reading, exhortation and teaching have no text to work from. Without exhortation, reading and teaching remain intellectual exercises. Without teaching, exhortation lacks a doctrinal foundation. All three together make up the full ministry of the Word.

"Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given to you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you." This gift refers to the specific calling and ability for gospel ministry that God gave Timothy, and that was recognized and affirmed at his ordination. Gifts from God are not self-sustaining; they must be used, exercised, developed, and kept alive through intentional practice. An elder who does not preach will lose his skill in preaching. A pastor who does not practice personal evangelism will see his evangelistic instincts weaken. A minister who does not

devote himself to prayer will find his prayer life withering. Gifts are given to be put to use, and neglecting them is a kind of ingratitude.

“Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.” The words translated as “immerse yourself” here carry the sense of being completely inside something, thoroughly absorbed in it. Paul is calling Timothy not merely to perform the duties of ministry but to inhabit them, to be the kind of man for whom these things are not external obligations but the expression of who he genuinely is. The goal is progress, visible growth, the kind of development that the congregation can observe over time. The minister who is the same man at the end of ten years of ministry as he was at the beginning has not been immersed in the things of Christ. He has been going through the motions.

The final instruction is perhaps the most searching: “keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers.” The minister’s faithfulness to his own spiritual life and to the truth of his teaching is not just a private matter. It is one of the primary ways God, by His grace, brings salvation to those under his care. This is not a claim that the minister saves anyone by his own power. We know that salvation in Christ belongs to God alone. The pastor’s faithfulness is a means through which God’s grace normally reaches the congregation. A pastor who neglects his own soul and his teaching not only harms himself but also deprives God’s people of the very means Christ uses to build and nourish his church.

Study Questions

1. Paul says the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith. Recognizing that we live in those later times, how should this warning shape the church's approach to its teaching ministry and its evaluation of those who teach?

2. How does believing in the goodness of God's creation help protect Christians from false teachings that promote unnecessary self-denial?

3. Paul describes the false teachers as having seared consciences, burned into insensitivity by repeated sin and unrepentance. What practical disciplines help a believer keep the conscience sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God?

4. Paul says that training in godliness is of value in every way, holding promise for the present life and also for the life to come, while physical training has only limited value. What does this comparison suggest about the priorities of the Christian life? How does one actually train for godliness?

5. Timothy is instructed to set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Consider each of these five areas. In which of them is it most difficult to set a consistent example? What makes consistency in that area so challenging?

6. Paul says that by keeping watch on himself and his teaching, Timothy will save both himself and his hearers. What does this suggest about the relationship between the minister's personal spiritual health and the spiritual health of the congregation he serves?

Chapter Five: Shepherding the Household of God (5:1–6:2)

The Delicacy of Pastoral Relationships (5:1–2)

As we enter the fifth chapter of First Timothy, Paul's focus shifts from addressing urgent matters such as false teaching and church leadership to the quieter yet equally important topic of how a pastor relates to the people in his care. This section is less concerned with doctrine or formal roles and more with the quality of relationships that make ministry genuinely pastoral rather than simply administrative.

The danger Paul addresses at the start of the chapter is subtle yet real. Timothy has been instructed to command and teach, to deal firmly with false teachers, and to uphold apostolic truth. All of this requires a certain measure of authority and firmness. However, there is a way of exercising authority that pushes people away rather than drawing them in, breeds resentment rather than trust, and turns the household of God into a place of anxiety and control rather than of grace and welcome. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wisely addresses this danger before it can take root.

"Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father." The Greek word for rebuke here literally means to strike at or treat harshly. Paul tells Timothy not to use his authority as a blunt instrument against older men. Instead, he should treat an older man as a son would treat his father, with the respect and deference that age deserves, and with the humility to recognize that even as he leads, he still has much to learn from those who are older.

Treat "younger men as brothers." There is an equality implied in brotherhood, a sense of shared standing before God that remains even when one of the brothers is the pastor. A minister who treats younger men in the congregation as subordinates rather than as brothers in Christ has misunderstood his calling. He is a servant, not a ruler. His authority exists for their benefit, not for himself.

Treat "older women as mothers and younger women as sisters in all purity." The phrase "in all purity," added to the instruction about younger women, is important. Timothy was a young man, and Paul understood the realities of human nature. The pastoral relationship involves genuine intimacy and trust, but this can become a source of temptation if clear and consistent boundaries

are not maintained. A pastor who cares for younger women as sisters, with the respectful and appropriate love a brother has for a sister, will protect both himself and those he serves.

William Hendriksen observes, with characteristic pastoral wisdom, that to correct one's own mother requires deep humility, genuine searching of the heart, wrestling at the throne of grace, and wisdom. This is exactly right. The pastor who must address a failing in an older woman in the congregation is in one of the most delicate of all pastoral situations. He must be honest because the truth of the gospel requires it. He must be gentle, because the woman before him is his mother in the household of God. He must be humble because he knows his own capacity for failure. Getting this right requires an abundance of God's grace.

The Church and Its Widows (5:3–16)

The extended discussion of widows that follows takes up more space in the letter than any other practical issue, and that fact is significant. Caring for widows was not a peripheral matter for the early church. As Paul shows by grounding it in God's character and purposes, it was an essential expression of the very nature of the community Christ created.

Before looking at Paul's specific instructions, it is worth pausing to notice how deeply Scripture cares for widows. The number of passages addressing widows is remarkable. The following is by no means an exhaustive list. Psalm 68:5 describes God as a "father to the fatherless and a protector of widows." Deuteronomy 10:18 teaches us that God "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow." Deuteronomy 27:19 pronounces a curse on anyone "who perverts the justice to the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow." Isaiah 1:17 calls God's people to plead the widow's cause as a mark of true repentance. Proverbs 15:25 says, "The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries." Jeremiah 7:6 lists failure to care for widows among the offenses that bring God's judgment. Malachi 3:5 names oppressing widows as a sin that God will judge. In the New Testament, Luke 7 tells of Jesus stopping a funeral to raise a widow's only son, moved by compassion for her. Acts 6 addresses the neglect of widows in the daily food distribution as an urgent problem needing immediate attention. James 1:27 tells us that pure and undefiled religion before God is "to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

The message across all these passages is clear: the character of a local church shaped by the God of the Bible will be seen in how it treats its most vulnerable members. In the ancient world, widows

were among the most economically vulnerable people. Their status and security were often tied to having a husband, and without one, they depended on the charity of family or the community for survival. A church that ignores the widow is not just failing to meet a social need; it is failing to reflect the character of the God it claims to worship.

Paul's instructions are not a blanket command for the church to support every widow. He is responding to the real needs and limitations of a specific congregation and introduces important distinctions. These guidelines help the church care for widows who truly need assistance while ensuring that its resources are used with wisdom and discernment.

The main distinction Paul makes is between the true widow and the widow who is not truly in need. A true widow, as Paul defines her, has no family to support her and shows the marks of genuine faith: "she has set her hope on God, continues in prayer night and day, and has a reputation for good works." She has faithfully raised children, "shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, cared for the afflicted, and devoted herself to every good work." This is a picture of a woman whose life has been spent serving others rather than herself, and whose present need gives her a real claim on the congregation's generosity.

Paul's first principle is that family responsibility comes before church support. He writes, "If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this pleases God." Taking care of aging parents and grandparents is not optional for a Christian family. It is an expression of godliness, a practical fulfillment of the fifth commandment to honor father and mother, and it is a duty that falls on the family before it falls on the church. Paul's words about neglecting this obligation are strong: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

This language is intentionally strong. Caring for aging parents is not simply a sentimental preference or a cultural tradition that can be ignored when inconvenient. It is a theological responsibility, rooted in the nature of the Christian faith itself. True faith produces people who keep their commitments to family, who do not abandon the vulnerable in their own households, and who know that the love of God, as shown in the gospel, must be made visible in concrete acts of care for those closest to them.

The description of the true widow in verses nine and ten includes a minimum age of sixty years. Paul advises that widows younger than this should remarry rather than be enrolled in the congregation's widow support system. His reasoning is both pastoral and practical: younger widows may be drawn away from their original commitment to Christ by strong desires, and by remarrying, they could break an earlier pledge, bringing judgment on themselves. Paul's counsel is that it is better for "younger widows to marry, have children, manage their households, and give the adversary no reason for slander." This is not a lesser spiritual calling. It is a wise recognition that for most young women, Christian life and vocation are lived out in the context of marriage and family, not in a life of full-time service to the church.

The enrollment of real widows for congregational support appears to have been an organized system, possibly involving a formal list maintained by the deacons of women who met certain qualifications. This approach shows that the early church cared for its most vulnerable members with deliberate structure and intention. Instead of relying on chance or informal help, the church put systems in place to ensure that qualified widows received regular and dignified support.

The Congregation and Its Elders (5:17–25)

After discussing the church's responsibility to its widows at length, Paul now addresses its responsibility to its elders. He deals with three topics in the following verses: financial support, discipline, and ordination. Each is considered in light of the congregation's core duty to honor those who serve it faithfully.

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and the laborer deserves his wages.'" The double honor Paul refers to is not just emotional or relational respect, though it certainly includes that. It also means material provision and financial support that allow the elder devoted to preaching and teaching to do his work without needing another job to support himself. This is clearly supported by the two Scriptural examples Paul gives. The ox that treads out the grain is allowed to eat as it works, and the laborer deserves his wages. In the same way, the elder who works hard at preaching and teaching is a worker who deserves to be paid.

Financial support for pastors is not a secondary concern to be addressed at the congregation's convenience. It is a matter of justice and proper ordering within the body of Christ. A congregation

that chronically underpays its pastoral staff or treats pastoral support as a burden to be minimized rather than an obligation to be met is not spiritually minded. It is failing in one of its most basic responsibilities. The elder who must work two jobs to survive will inevitably have less time and energy for preaching, teaching, and pastoral care than the elder whose congregation supports him appropriately.

Paul next addresses the matter of discipline, and the principles he gives are just as important today as they were in the first century. He writes, “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.” This follows the law of Deuteronomy 19:15 and reflects the special vulnerability of church leaders. Elders, because they hold positions of trust and influence, are especially exposed to accusations. A true accusation of serious sin by an elder can seriously harm the congregation and damage the witness of the gospel. A false accusation, motivated by personal grievance or political motives, can ruin the ministry and reputation of an innocent man. The requirement for multiple witnesses helps protect both the church and the elder.

Paul continues, “As for those elders who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.” This is perhaps the most uncomfortable instruction in this section, but it is also one of the most important. An elder who holds public trust and has sinned publicly cannot be disciplined privately without sending the message that leaders are above accountability. The integrity of the church and the honor of Christ require that public sin by a public figure be addressed publicly. This does not mean exposing people for its own sake or creating a culture of humiliation. It means that the church must be honest and pastoral, holding leaders to the same standards as everyone else and dealing with sin openly and truthfully.

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.” The seriousness of this charge is clear. Paul places the instruction on impartial discipline under the witness of God, Christ Jesus, and the angels, emphasizing that it is not a matter of personal preference or politics. It is a matter of faithfulness before the Judge of all. Showing partiality in the discipline of elders, whether by favoring those we like or being too harsh with those we do not, is a distortion of justice that the gospel does not allow.

Paul then addresses ordination: “do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.” Laying on of hands is the act by which the congregation formally recognizes and commissions someone for ministry. Paul’s warning against rushing this process shows that the church shares responsibility for those it ordains. If a congregation installs someone who is not ready, whose character has not been tested, or whose theology has not been examined, the congregation shares in the consequences of any resulting failures. Careful and deliberate evaluation before ordination is an act of care for the church as much as it is a standard for the candidate.

Instructions Regarding Slaves (6:1–2)

In reference to the first two verses of chapter 6, the chapter’s final section addresses the conduct of enslaved members of the congregation. Interpreting this passage requires careful attention to context, as is true for all New Testament texts about slavery. Paul is not endorsing slavery as consistent with God’s will. From creation to new creation, the Bible affirms that human beings are made in God’s image and are meant for freedom and dignity. The direction of biblical ethics is always toward affirming that dignity. Christians in history who used Paul’s words to defend slavery were overlooking the deeper message of the gospel.

Paul is addressing the immediate pastoral situation of men and women in the congregation who are already enslaved. His concern is that their conduct should not bring dishonor to the gospel or give critics a reason to accuse the church of causing social disorder. Those “under the yoke as bondservants are to regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.” The motivation is missional: the faithful service of a Christian slave is a witness to the transforming power of the gospel, showing that Christ’s grace can bring dignity and faithfulness even in unjust situations. On the other hand, a Christian slave who is contentious or disrespectful gives critics a reason to reject the gospel as a source of social disruption.

The instruction to those with believing masters is especially noteworthy because it challenges what we might expect from the gospel. It would be easy to assume that faith in Christ would erase or diminish the social distinction between master and slave. Paul, however, says not to be disrespectful just because they are brothers in Christ. Instead, the brotherhood they share in Christ does not eliminate the social relationship but transforms it. When a believing slave faithfully serves his believing master, he honors the Lord they both serve. Likewise, when a believing master treats

his enslaved brother as a brother in Christ, he also honors the Lord. In this way, both are practicing the gospel faithfully in the situation God has placed them in.

Study Questions

1. Paul instructs Timothy to treat different groups within the congregation as members of his own family: older men as fathers, older women as mothers, younger men as brothers, younger women as sisters. How does this family metaphor shape the character and tone of pastoral ministry? What does it protect against?

2. Paul says that the one who does not provide for his own household has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. What is the theological basis for this strong statement? How does care for aging family members express the character of Christian faith?

3. The portrait of the real widow in verses nine and ten is a portrait of a life of faithful, others-centered service over many decades. What does this portrait suggest about the relationship between how a person has lived and the congregation's long-term responsibility to them?

4. Paul says elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. What does a congregation's financial support for its pastors communicate about its values? What does inadequate support communicate?

5. Paul warns against being hasty in the laying on of hands, noting that the church shares in the sins of those it installs prematurely. What does a thorough, careful process of evaluation look like before someone is ordained or installed in ministry?

6. Paul's instructions to Christian slaves are motivated by the concern that the name of God and the teaching not be reviled. How does this principle, that Christian conduct in unjust situations should honor the gospel rather than discredit it, apply to the way Christians should behave in situations of injustice or difficulty today?

Chapter Six: The Good Fight of Faith and the Final Charge (6:2b–21)

The Letter's Beginning and End: A Deliberate Structure

One of the more remarkable features of First Timothy is the way its closing section deliberately echoes and responds to its opening. This is not a matter of style or coincidence. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter with the skill of a craftsman who knew that structure itself could communicate meaning. The parallels between chapters one and six tie the entire letter together and highlight the themes that have shaped it from beginning to end.

The parallels between the opening and closing sections of the letter are both numerous and specific. In chapter one, verse three, Timothy is instructed to teach, and in chapter six, verse two, he is told to "teach and urge these things." The letter begins by addressing false teachers at Ephesus and ends with another extended discussion about them. Early on, the misunderstanding centers on the law's purpose; later, it focuses on the connection between godliness and financial gain. In chapter one, Paul presents himself as the example, showing how the gospel can transform even the worst of sinners. In chapter six, Timothy is set forth as the model, called to fulfill his commission with the same faithfulness Paul has shown. Both the opening and closing sections include doxologies, those moments that move from teaching into worship. Both also repeat Timothy's specific commission.

Commentator Philip Towner, in his careful study of the Pastoral Epistles, has shown that these parallels are not accidental. His analysis demonstrates that First Timothy is structured in what he calls a "ring composition," with the central section, chapter three verses fourteen through sixteen, serving as the letter's theological heart. This structure shows that First Timothy is not merely a collection of loosely connected pastoral instructions. Instead, it is a carefully unified document, with each section working together toward the same core purpose: equipping both the minister and the congregation to be the pillar and support of the truth in a world filled with false teaching and competing claims.

The Final Treatment of False Teaching (6:2b–6)

Paul returns one final time in this letter to the subject that opened it and has never been far from view throughout: the false teachers and their destructive influence on the congregation at Ephesus.

He addresses the origin, character, and effects of the teaching, working through each in turn and setting the false teaching in contrast to the sound, healthy teaching that Timothy is to command and teach.

The origin of sound teaching is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Paul says that the false teachers do not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness. This is a double identification of the standard: the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness. The apostolic teaching that Paul has been defending throughout this letter does not originate with Paul, but with Christ, who spoke through the apostles by the Holy Spirit. To depart from apostolic teaching is therefore not simply to disagree with Paul. It is to move away from Christ, who is the truth and the source of all sound teaching.

The word "sound," which appears repeatedly in the Pastoral Epistles as a description of authentic Christian teaching, carries the physical sense of healthy or whole. The image is medical: sound teaching produces health in the congregation, just as sound food and sound medical treatment produce health in the body. The sound words of Christ are nourishing, life-giving, and health-producing for those who receive them in faith. They accomplish what they are designed to accomplish, forming the mind, heart, and will of the believer in conformity with Christ's character.

The contrast with the character of false teaching is stark. The false teacher is puffed up with conceit, understanding nothing, yet driven by an unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words. The phrase "unhealthy craving" uses the negative form of the same word family that describes sound teaching as "healthy." The false teacher is not merely wrong. He is sick, suffering from a spiritual pathology that drives him toward controversy as an addict is driven toward the substance destroying him. From this sickness flow the consequences that Paul catalogs in verses four and five: envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

The test that Paul applies throughout this letter to both teaching and teachers is the test of fruit. What does this teaching produce? Does it produce love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith? Does it produce godliness, that authentic, whole-life orientation toward God that is the proper fruit of sound doctrine, or does it produce controversy, division, envy, and slander? The fruit identifies the root. A teaching that consistently produces the second list rather than the first is

not sound, whatever its intellectual sophistication or rhetorical appeal. The "aim of our charge," as Paul stated at the very beginning of the letter in 1:5, "is love that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. That is the standard for biblical teaching, and it must be applied with consistency.

Godliness and Contentment (6:6–10)

The observation that false teachers view godliness as a means of making money leads Paul to discuss the proper relationship between godliness and material wealth. He begins with a statement that sounds like a paradox: "godliness with contentment is great gain." The false teachers believed their religious devotion would bring financial prosperity. Paul does say that godliness leads to gain, but the kind of gain he has in mind is completely different from what they imagined.

The word translated as contentment is the Greek term Paul uses in his second letter to the Corinthians (9:8) for "sufficiency": "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." The believer's contentment is not a resigned acceptance of whatever circumstances bring. It is not the stoic's studied indifference to external conditions. Instead, it is far richer and more active. Contentment is the experience of finding in Christ all that one needs, of discovering that the grace of God is truly sufficient for every situation, and of reaching the settled conviction that nothing this world can offer or withhold can add to or take away from the essential wealth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord.

Paul's personal testimony to this contentment appears in some of the most beautiful words in all his letters. In Philippians 3:8–10, he writes:

> "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

This is not the language of a man who has achieved contentment through discipline or through a carefully cultivated philosophical detachment. It is the language of a man who has found something so valuable that everything else shrinks by comparison.

The theological foundation for contentment in 1 Timothy 6:7–8 is among the simplest and most profound in Scripture: “for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of it. But if we have food and clothing with these we will be content.” This underscores how temporary material possessions truly are. We are born with nothing and leave with nothing. The things of this world are passing away, but the things of Christ are eternal. When a believer truly understands this, they do not need much material comfort to experience real well-being, because real well-being comes from a relationship with the living God. This is something no earthly circumstance can take away.

The warning in verses nine and ten is among the New Testament’s best-known passages, yet it is often misquoted. Money itself is not the root of all evil. It is the “love of money that is the root of all kinds of evils.” Paul is not condemning wealth or money in general. In verses seventeen through nineteen, he addresses the wealthy and encourages them to use their resources wisely rather than give them all away. The real issue is the love of money, a desire for financial gain that becomes the main focus of a person’s life. This desire can influence decisions, compromise integrity, crowd out concern for others, and ultimately take God out of the center of life.

Paul goes on to explain how the love of money progresses. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” The turning point comes when the desire for wealth becomes an end in itself rather than a means of serving God. Once that desire takes hold, it opens the door to temptation. Temptation then lures the person into a snare, a trap that seems like an opportunity but is actually a trap. This snare gives rise to many harmful desires, passions that seem urgent but lead to harm. In the end, these passions plunge the soul into ruin and destruction.

The image of plunging was used in the ancient world to describe a ship’s sinking, and it connects directly to the image of shipwreck that Paul used in chapter one to describe the fate of Hymenaeus and Alexander. The love of money is not a mild temptation that quietly leads people away from God. It is a powerful current that can pull even the strongest believer away from safety if they are not watchful. Paul says that through this craving, some have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. These wounds are self-inflicted. Wandering follows craving, and both the wounds and the wandering are completely unnecessary, because the one who offers true sufficiency has already given Himself freely to all who are willing to receive Him.

Instructions to the Wealthy (6:17–19)

Having warned about the dangers of the love of money, Paul turns to address those in the congregation who are actually wealthy. His tone is notably different from the tone of the warning he has just issued. He is not telling the wealthy to give away everything they have or to feel guilty for their prosperity. He is telling them what to do with what they have. The instructions are both practical and theologically grounded.

"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy." Paul addresses two dangers facing the wealthy believer. The first is pride, the tendency to equate wealth with personal worth. Money can lead people to believe they are more important or capable than those with less. The believer who understands the gospel knows this is not true. Wealth is a gift, not an achievement. It does not determine a person's worth before God, which is established only by what Christ has done, nor does it say anything about the value of those who have less.

The second danger is placing hope in wealth rather than in God. Wealth often creates a sense of security and fosters the belief that needs can be met and crises managed simply because resources are available. This security is fragile, however. Riches are uncertain, as Paul points out, and history is filled with examples of fortunes lost in an instant. The believer who places hope in God rather than in riches finds security no economic crisis can shake and a foundation no financial storm can destroy.

The positive instructions are equally important. The wealthy are "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." The wealthy believer is not called to renounce wealth but to redirect it. The resources God has given are to be deployed in good works, in generosity, in the kind of sharing that blesses others and builds up the community of faith. In so doing, the wealthy believer is laying up treasure not in the bank accounts of this world but in the account that endures into eternity. They are to "take hold of that which is truly life": the eternal life found in Christ, which begins now in the practice of Christlike generosity.

The Final Personal Charge (6:11–16, 20–:21)

The letter reaches its most personal and urgent moment in the final charge Paul addresses directly to Timothy. He has been dealing with structures, qualifications, and instructions for various groups within the congregation. Now he speaks directly to the man himself, and his words carry both affection and solemnity.

He addresses Timothy as "O man of God." This title carries deep meaning in the history of God's people. In the Old Testament, it was used for men like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, prophets who stood before God and spoke for Him to His people. Calling Timothy a man of God places him in that line of succession, among those called, shaped, and sent by God to speak His word. It is both an honor and a weighty responsibility.

"But you, O man of God, flee these things." The things to flee are the love of money and all the harm Paul has just described. The man of God does not simply resist or try to manage these temptations. He flees. The verb is the same one Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6:18, when he says, "Flee from sexual immorality." Some temptations must be faced directly, but others must be escaped quickly. The love of money falls into the second group. Anyone who lingers near it, hoping to master it, has already made a mistake.

"Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness." The positive response to fleeing sin is to actively pursue virtue. These six qualities are not a random list. Together, they paint a picture of a minister shaped by the gospel: righteous in conduct, godly in devotion, faithful in trust, loving in relationships, steadfast in perseverance, and gentle in dealing with others. The minister who cultivates these virtues is not just avoiding the failures that can destroy a ministry. He is building the character that will sustain a ministry through years of demanding, costly, and often unrewarded service.

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." The military image of fighting the good fight carries its full weight here. Ministry is not an easy journey through pleasant territory. It is a sustained struggle against the enemies of the gospel, carried out through difficulty, disappointment, opposition, and the slow work of faithfulness year after year. The word "good" describes the fight, and its goodness is worth noting. It is a worthy and glorious fight, with the

prize being eternal life and the Judge being the Lord of all. To fight the good fight of faith is to spend your life in service to something that will outlast everything else.

Paul grounds this charge in two great truths. First, it is given in the "presence of God, who gives life to all things," and second, in the presence of "Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession." The first truth is God's sovereignty over all life, the God before whom Timothy will ultimately give an account. The second is the example of Christ, who stood before the Roman governor and testified to the truth even at the cost of His own life. The faithfulness Paul calls for in Timothy reflects the faithfulness Christ Himself showed. The minister of Christ is not being asked to do anything that Christ has not already done, and at far greater cost.

I charge you to "keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." The commandment here means the whole apostolic teaching Timothy has received and that this letter affirms. To keep it unstained is to maintain its integrity, refusing to compromise under pressure, holding to it when it is unpopular, proclaiming it when it is inconvenient, and living by it even when it is costly. "Free from reproach" means Timothy's life must be consistent with the teaching he proclaims, so no one can point to a contradiction between his message and his actions.

The doxology in verses fifteen and sixteen is one of the most majestic in all of Paul's letters, closing the main argument with pure adoration. "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen." Four great attributes of God stand out. He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the absolute ruler of everything, whose authority is not limited by any other. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, before whom all earthly power is ultimately accountable. He alone has immortality, possessing self-existent life that depends on nothing else. He dwells in unapproachable light, only accessible to us because in His grace He has chosen to reveal Himself.

This is the God in whose presence Timothy serves. This is the God whose household he manages, whose Word he is defending and proclaiming, and whose truth he is to keep "unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ." The weight of that responsibility and

the glory of that calling come together in this doxology, leading Paul to say: to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

The letter closes with two final notes. The first is a brief instruction to Timothy about managing the resources of the wealthy in the congregation, which has already been discussed. The second is a warning to guard the deposit as the letter draws to a close: “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.”

The deposit is the gospel, the apostolic teaching, and the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ that have been entrusted to the church through the ministry of the apostles. Timothy is now responsible for passing this teaching on faithfully to the next generation. The false teachers have brought in irreverent talk and contradictions that they falsely call knowledge, and some have wandered from the faith because of it. Timothy’s task is to guard against this, to hold firmly to what he has received, and to reject the substitutes, distortions, and speculative ideas promoted by the false teachers.

The letter ends with a final word of grace. “Grace be with you.” The word “you” is plural in the Greek text, reminding us that although the letter is addressed personally to Timothy, its message is meant for the whole congregation. The grace Paul invokes is the grace of God who saves sinners and brings them into His household, the grace that meets every need, and the grace most fully shown in the gift of His Son. Grace opens this letter and closes it, fittingly, for it is both the source and the sustainer of everything Paul has written about.

Study Questions

1. Paul shows that the opening and closing sections of First Timothy are intentionally parallel in their structure. What does this pattern tell us about the main theme that holds the letter together? How does seeing this structure help you understand the letter's overall message and purpose?

2. Paul teaches that godliness with contentment is great gain, using the same word for contentment that he uses for sufficiency in 2 Corinthians 9:8. According to Scripture, what is the true source of contentment for a believer? In what ways is this contentment different from the sense of security that comes from material wealth or possessions?

3. Paul warns that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. How does the love of money, as opposed to money itself, lead to the progressive departure from faith in Christ that Paul describes in verses nine and ten? What does it mean for a believer to have a right relationship with material wealth?

4. In verses seventeen through nineteen, Paul addresses the wealthy, not by calling them to give up their wealth, but by urging them to be generous. What do his instructions teach about how those whom God has blessed with abundance should use and steward their material resources?

5. Paul addresses Timothy as "O man of God," a title with deep roots in the Old Testament prophetic tradition. What does this title imply about the calling, character, and accountability of those who minister the Word of God in the congregation of Christ?

6. The letter ends with the command to guard the deposit entrusted to you. What is this deposit? What does it mean for both the congregation and its ministers to be faithful in protecting it? In what ways can an ordinary believer help guard the deposit of the gospel in everyday life?

Conclusion: The Household of God in Every Age

We have stepped through the full length of the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to his beloved friend Timothy, and it is worth pausing at the end to reflect on what we have seen. The letter is intensely particular. It was written by a specific man to a specific man in a specific city facing specific problems. The false teachers in Ephesus were real people teaching real errors to real members of a real congregation. The qualifications Paul lays out for elders and deacons were meant to be applied immediately to the men serving in or being considered for those offices in Ephesus. The instructions about widows were meant to be implemented in the context of a real congregation's real resources and real needs. The charge to Timothy at the letter's end was a personal word to a man Paul loved like a son.

At the very first reading of this letter in the congregation at Ephesus, those who heard it must have recognized that its application extended far beyond the immediate situation that prompted it. The false teachers of Ephesus are gone, but the spirit of false teaching is not. The qualifications for elders and deacons in the first-century church are the same as those needed in the twenty-first-century church. The challenges of congregational prayer, proper roles in worship, care for the vulnerable, integrity in leadership, and the relationship between godliness and material wealth are not just ancient curiosities. They are permanent features of the life of the household of God in every age and every culture.

The controlling image Paul uses throughout the letter, the "household of God," deserves careful reflection. A household is a community with a head, a structure, a shared life, and common purposes. The "household of God" is the community over which the Lord Jesus Christ presides as its head, brought into being through his blood and Spirit. It exists to uphold and proclaim God's truth and to provide care and nurture for its members in accordance with God's good order. Every instruction in this letter serves this vision of the "household of God": sound in teaching, pure in conduct, ordered in leadership, compassionate toward the vulnerable, and faithful to the truth that is its reason for existence.

The false teachers threatened to corrupt this household by introducing a spirit of speculation, division, and self-promotion, the exact opposite of what the gospel produces. Paul's response was not only to argue against false teaching, though he did that as well. He also presented a positive vision of the household as it should be, describing it in concrete, practical terms so the congregation

could clearly see the difference between what is genuine and what is counterfeit. The true congregation prays broadly and persistently for all people. It conducts its worship with ordered dignity that reflects the holiness of the God it worships. Its leaders are men of proven character and genuine calling. Its vulnerable members are cared for consistently and graciously. Its ministers are appropriately supported and honestly held accountable. Its wealthy members are generous rather than proud. Its teaching produces godliness rather than controversy. Its gospel is cherished, guarded, proclaimed, and lived day by day.

The call to Timothy at the end of the letter is the call to every minister of the gospel in every age: fight the good fight of faith, guard the deposit entrusted to you, and keep the commandment unstained until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fight is good because the cause is right and the prize is eternal. The deposit is worth guarding because nothing else in the world is as valuable as the truth that sinners are saved by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The commandment, finally, is worth keeping unstained because the God who gave it is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom alone belongs honor and eternal dominion. May the Lord Jesus Christ be praised for all eternity!

"And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'

And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped."

Grace be with you all.

I Timothy – Full Outline

I. Opening (1:1–2)

A. Salutation

1. Credentials

2. A look back

3. A look ahead

II. False Teaching (1:3–6,18–20)

A. The substance of false teaching: deviation from sound doctrine (1:3–4)

B. The result of false teaching (1:4–5)

1. Useless speculation rather than God's revelation

2. Division and dissension rather than love

C. The cause of false teaching (1:6)

D. The charge and exhortation renewed (1:18–20)

III. The Law and the Gospel (1:7–17)

A. What Paul says of the Law (1:7–11)

1. The wrong use of the Law (1:7)

2. The right purpose of the Law (1:8–11)

3. Three Usages of the Law in Reformed Theology

B. What Paul says of the Gospel

1. Personal testimony (1:12–14)

2. Grace to all mankind in Christ Jesus (1:15–16)

3. Doxology to the God of grace (1:17)

I Timothy 2:1–3:16

I. Congregational prayer and proper objects of prayer (2:1–2)

A. Scope

1. Priority – “First of all”

2. Wide and broad - “all”

3. Contrast with false teachers

4. Types of prayers

5. Purpose – quiet and peaceful life

II. The Grounds/Foundation for Congregational Prayer (2:3–2:8)

A. The basis for the Apostle Paul’s appeal

1. Good and acceptable

2. Desire of God – “all”

3. Not “universalism”

B. Evidence and proof that show God’s saving desire

1. Three theological doctrines

a) Oneness of God

b) Christ the mediator

c) Christ death securing redemption.

2. The Ransom

3. Paul's calling

III. Status and Conduct of Christian Women (2:9–15)

A. Guiding Fundamental Principles

1. #1

2. #2

3. #3

B. A woman's dress, demeanor, activities (2:9–10)

1. External beauty

2. Internal beauty

3. Priority

C. A woman's behavior (2:11–14)

1. Meaning of the text

2. Significance of the text/reasons for prohibition

D. A woman's "salvation" (2:15)

1. Two presuppositions

2. Two interpretations

IV. Qualifications for Church Leadership (3:1–13)

A. Introduction: The ministry – a noble, essential, **God-gifted** task to be desired

1. Context continuation

2. Gifts to the Church of Christ (Ephesians 4:1–16)

B. Offices in the church of Jesus Christ

1. Three introductory comments

a) Philippians 1:1

b) Importance of the offices

c) Interchangeable words

2. Presbyter/Overseer: (3:1–7)

a) Presbyter/Elder: Jewish origin - denoting seniority and dignity

b) Overseer/Bishop: Greek origin - denoting function, pastoral oversight

c) Structure of passage (v. 1–7)

(1) Desire and commendation

(2) Eleven qualifications (see handout)

(3) Three specific situations and three specific reasons

- Situation/Reason #1

- Situation/Reason #2

- Situation/Reason #3

3. Office of Deacon (3:8–13)

   a) Overlap with the elder list.

      (1) Similarities

      (2) Dissimilarities

   b) “Wives” or “Women” verse 11

   c) Qualification List (handout)

      (1) Self-Mastery

      (2) Orthodox convictions

      (3) Tested and approved.

(4) Home Life

(5) Deacon duties/functions

V. Purpose statement – "Heart of corpus" (3:14–16)

A. Priority of Christ's Church.

B. Hymn of praise to the LORD Jesus Christ.

1. Stanza 1

2. Stanza 2

I Timothy 4:1–16

I. False Teachers/Source of heresy (4:1–5)

A. Later-day Apostasy

1. Later days

2. The “Spirit expressly says”

B. The nature of the false teaching

1. Extreme ascetism

2. Creation blessings

3. Heresy

C. The origins of false teaching

1. Devil’s lies

2. Seared conscience

D. Guarding against false teaching

1. Study and obedience to Word of God

2. Maintaining a clear conscience

II. Sound teaching and Godliness (4:6–10)

A. Sound doctrine/Good servant

1. Instruction in sound doctrine

2. Self-discipline in doctrine and practice

3. Another "Trustworthy saying"

III. Timothy: Model of a healthy teacher (4:11–16)

A. Dual imperatives/ “These things” – (v. 11)

B. Duties as a minister of Christ Jesus (v. 12,13)

C. Exercising his gift (v. 14)

D. Being constant (v. 15-16)

I Timothy 5:1–6:2a

I. Minister's exhortations (5:1–2)

A. Diversity of ages/gender

1. Older men
2. Younger men
3. Older women
4. Younger women

II. Instructions regarding widows in the Church (5:3–16)

A. God's concern for widows

1. Psalm 68:5, Deuteronomy 10:18, Deuteronomy 27:19, Isaiah1:17, Proverbs 15:25, Jeremiah 7:6, Malachi 3:1–5, Luke 7:11–17, Acts 6:1, James 1:27

B. General Command: Honor/support "real widows" (v.3)

C. Principle: own family first (v.4)

D. Brief initial description of a "real widow" (vv. 5–7)

E. Reiteration of principle: own family first (v. 8)

F. Details of a "real widow" (vv.9–10)

1. At least 60 years old

2. Faithful to her (now deceased) husband

3. Reputation for good works
    - Raised children
    - Hospitality
    - Served fellow believers
    - Helped the afflicted
    - Devoted to every good work

4. No younger Widows (vv. 11–15)

5. Final reiteration of principle "own family first," allowing church to support "real widows" (v. 16)

III. Instruction regarding Elders of the Church (5:17–25)

A. Payment of elders (5:17–18)

B. Discipline of elders (5:19–21)

C. Appointment of Elders (5:22–25)

IV. Instruction regarding slaves (6:1–2)

A. Recognition of the indignity of slavery

B. No incitement to rebellion or disobedience

C. Principle of brotherhood

I Timothy 6:2b–21

I. The opening and closing of 1 Timothy compared

Opening Feature	Closing Feature
1:3 Command to Timothy to instruct	6:2b Command to Timothy to teach
1:4–7a Topic/Description: false teachers Positive theme: love	6:3–6 Topic/Description: false teachers Positive theme: godliness
1:7b–10: Misunderstanding: the law [purpose of the law explained]	6:5–6 Misunderstanding: godliness/wealth [godliness explained]
	6:7–10: Desire for wealth critiqued
1:11–16 Contrasting Model: Paul [conversion/calling] [role of the historical Jesus]	6:11–15: Contrasting Model: Timothy [restating Timothy's commission] [example of the historical Jesus]
1:17 Doxology	6:15b–16 Doxology
	17–19: Instruction to the wealthy
1:18–20 Timothy's commission repeated	6:20–21 Timothy's commission repeated

Table can be found in *The Letters of Timothy and Titus*, Philip Towner, NICNT, P390

II. Final Discussion of the False Teachers (6:2b–6)

A. "Teach and urge these things"

B. The **origin** of the teaching

1. "Different doctrine"

2. "Sound words"

C. The **character** of the teaching

1. The "healthiness" of sound teaching

2. The “sickness” of false teaching

D. The **effects** of the teaching

1. Godliness, the effect of sound teaching

2. Ungodliness, the effect of false teaching

III. Instructions concerning contentment (6:7–10, 17–19)

A. Godliness and sufficiency (6:6–8)

1. 2 Corinthians 9:8

2. Philippians 3:8–10

3. Matthew 6:29–34

B. Dangers of wealth (6:9–10)

1. The progressive nature of sin

2. The issue is NOT money

C. Instructions concerning the wealthy (6:17–19)

1. God’s guidance for the wealthy

2. Good works

IV. The Apostle Paul's final charge to Timothy (6:11–16, 20–21)

A. The title "O man of God" (6:11)

B. Four reasons to persevere (6:12b,6:12c,6:13b,6:15–16)

C. The imperatives and Christian virtues (6:11–12)

- "Flee"
- "Pursue"
- "Fight"
- "Take hold"

D. Four reasons to persevere (6:12b,6:12c,6:13b,6:15–16)

E. The doxology (6:15–16)

F. Concluding imperatives (6:20–21)

G. Grace to "you all" (6:21)

Letter to Titus

Sound Doctrine, Godly Living, and the Church in Crete

Preface to the Study of Titus

The letter Paul wrote to Titus is brief, just forty-six verses across three short chapters. Though brief, the letter is filled with substance and depth that invite careful and thoughtful reading. Like First Timothy, it is part of the group known as the Pastoral Epistles and shares their main concerns: the need for godly leadership, the threat of false teaching, and the essential connection between sound doctrine and a life that honors Christ. At the same time, Titus is its own letter, addressed to a particular individual in a specific context, and it deserves to be read with those unique circumstances in mind.

Titus was not Timothy. He was a Gentile convert, a trusted companion of Paul across many years of missionary labor, and a man who had already proven his gifts under pressure. When Paul left him in Crete, he was not sending a nervous young minister to hold a difficult position, as he had done with Timothy in Ephesus. He was deploying an experienced co-worker to bring order and gospel rootedness to a network of young congregations on an island with a well-earned reputation for moral disorder. The challenges Titus faced were real, and Paul's letter equips him to meet them with clarity and resolve.

What gives this short letter its remarkable power is the way Paul consistently grounds every practical instruction in theological reality. The qualifications for elders, the conduct expected of older men and women and younger men and workers, the posture of believers toward civil authorities, all of it flows from the grace that has appeared in Jesus Christ and points forward to the glory that is yet to appear at His return. Sound doctrine is never merely an intellectual achievement in these pages. It is the well from which godly living must be drawn, and Paul will not let Titus, or us, forget it.

This study follows the same approach used in the study of First Timothy. It is not a technical commentary but a pastoral guide, written for ordinary believers and those who teach them. The aim throughout is the same aim Paul pressed on Titus: that the people of God would adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every aspect of their lives, and that the grace which has taught us to say no to ungodliness would produce in us a people zealous for good works, waiting with hope for the blessed appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Reed S. Rusniak

Titus Chapter One: Apostolic Mission, Godly Elders, and the Cretan Opposition (1:1–16)

Opening Salutation (1:1–4)

The beginning of this letter, verses 1 through 4, is the longest and most detailed of the openings in the Pastoral letters. This may surprise you, as it did me. Except for the letters to Romans and Galatians, the opening of Titus contains more words than any other of the Apostle Paul's letters. What is also interesting is that most of the words in this opening appear in only one sentence in Greek.

Why is this? Why, in a short letter like Titus, which has only 46 verses, does Paul include such an intricate and detailed opening salutation? Why is there such a wealth of information, much of it doctrinal, between the first word, Paul, and the recipient's name, Titus?

Paul's Apostolic Mission

One interpretation I suggest is that the Apostle intends to explain the nature of his ministry and mission. Additionally, similar to 1 Timothy, Paul aims to convey his apostolic authority and the purpose of his mission. Although he has apostolic authority, he wanted to make it clear that people knew he would not misuse it. He states he is a "servant of God." The word "servant" here is the same Greek word for "slave" in the New Testament.

The primary goal of his apostolic mission, as shown in verse 1, is "for the faith of God's elect." In other words, his objective is to help those "chosen by God before the foundations of the world" (Ephesians 1:4) come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical doctrine of election is a wonderful and glorious truth for Christians, or at least it should be. In many letters, the Apostle Paul connects the Old Testament chosen people of God, Israel, with New Covenant elect believers. In the New Testament, it is not just Paul who makes this connection. The Apostle Peter writes, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Salvation from beginning to end is through the Lord's grace. As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:10, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation

that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Paul's main goal and deep desire were to be used by God to help the elect come to faith in Jesus Christ.

In verse 1, Paul's mission is not only for the "faith of God's elect" but also for "their knowledge of the truth." However, this is not just intellectual knowledge and understanding. Knowing the truth should lead to godliness, which means being Christlike and obedient to God. Christian, God desires your heart. Paul emphasizes multiple times in the pastoral letters the connection between knowing the truth and living godly. They should always go together. Remember 1 Timothy 6:3, "If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing."

Proclaiming to know the gospel but lacking concern for godliness is a trait of the false teachers in Crete. It is a sign of hypocrisy. Look at the last verse of chapter 1 of Titus: "They profess to know God but deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work" (Titus 1:16). The topic of "good works" in the Pastoral letters is an important duty for God's people. The Apostle Paul repeatedly emphasizes the importance of "good works." For this reason, true faith always results in good works.

As a pastoral concern, we must encourage those who love studying theology and seem to have extensive knowledge of the Scriptures to serve Christ through "good works." That is a key part of Paul's apostolic mission: preaching the truth that, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, guides believers to a godly, Christlike life.

That brings us to Paul's third purpose for his apostolic mission. He wants God's people to live in hope of eternal life. We said Paul is an apostle "for the sake of the elect" and to provide knowledge of the truth that leads to godly living. There is another reason he gives for the apostolic mission, however: to instill "hope of eternal life." In the opening of his second letter to Timothy, Paul states that his apostolic ministry is "according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:1).

The promise of eternal life is certain because it is based on the character of the eternal God. "God who never lies" has promised eternal life to His people even before the foundation of time. Look at chapter 3, verses 4 through 7. Paul writes about when the goodness and loving kindness of God

our Savior appeared; He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17 should provide much reassurance: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see the glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). The Word of God consistently reveals the origin of salvation and the promise of eternal life as part of God's gracious plan of redemption, established in eternity past.

In theology, this is known as the Covenant of Redemption. It is the covenant made within the triune Godhead, in which the Son entered this world and gave Himself to redeem a people for His own possession. Paul reminds Titus of one final purpose for his apostolic mission: to fulfill the commission God gave him by preaching the Word of God. Preaching the gospel was a core focus of the Apostles' ministry.

If you teach or preach, please resist the modern temptation to replace or shorten preaching time in the worship service with more music and songs. That seems to be happening in many churches worldwide. However, preaching has always been God's powerful way of drawing people to Christ. In another letter, writing to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The Apostle Paul never forgot that God had called him to preach the gospel. For Paul, there was no greater privilege. As part of God's eternal plan, preaching is essential for saving souls and strengthening believers. Writing to the church in Rome, he asked, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:13–15).

Brothers, the churches need faithful, Christ-centered preaching. If God has called you to preach and the church has affirmed your gifts, consider it the highest privilege. Fulfill your calling for the

glory of Jesus Christ. In chapter 2 of his Titus sermons, Calvin wrote about this verse that Paul "served God by dispensing the treasure of the gospel in which we have assurance of salvation." When you preach, brothers, you are sharing the treasure of the gospel.

The Elders (1:5–9)

Like at the start of 1 Timothy, Paul quickly states his reason for writing. In verse 5, he clarifies why he left Titus in Crete: "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."

Probably sometime after his release from prison in Rome, Paul evangelized on the island of Crete. The Lord blessed his efforts, and churches began to form in "every town," as verse 5 says. We don't know how long Paul stayed in Crete, but we do know that he couldn't remain there and needed Titus to continue the work.

Just as in 1 Timothy, which is a matter of some urgency, Paul provides instructions to Titus on the qualifications required to serve as an Elder. Much of Paul's guidance to Titus, though not all, is found in 1 Timothy 3. You will immediately notice, though, that there is no mention of a deacon in the letter to Titus.

Home Life

Circumstances were clearly different in Crete compared to Ephesus, where the Ephesian church had been established much longer. It makes sense that the apostles' primary focus was on establishing godly leadership, and Titus was assigned that role.

There are three areas where a potential elder should be "blameless" and "above reproach." Before that, four topics on Eldership provide a general overview. In verse 5, Paul uses the Greek word translated as "elders," presbyteros. In verse 7, he uses a different Greek word for the same office, translated as "overseer," episkopos, in our Bibles.

As with 1 Timothy, different words are used in the New Testament for elders: overseers, bishops, and sometimes shepherds. These terms refer to the same offices. The biblical pattern involves having multiple overseers, though this depends on God's providence. There may be times in newer, younger churches when having multiple elders isn't practical, and the process shouldn't be rushed. The goal of church planting is to appoint multiple elders.

All elders must be capable of teaching God's people. That is their primary role in the church. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul says they must be "able to teach." In Titus 1:9, the apostle states that the overseer must be "able to instruct in sound doctrine." Therefore, the overseer must have teaching gifts. He must not only be able to teach but also to refute error.

The church as a whole should participate in the approval process. An elder is not a dictator. He is a servant. The church must recognize and support his gifts and abilities.

The term "above reproach" essentially means unaccused. A person's character and conduct might not always be perfect, but they are free from any damaging moral or spiritual accusations. The Apostle Paul outlined the qualifications for church elders to Titus in three categories: a man's home life, character, and beliefs or doctrinal position.

We will start with the home. As one commentator said, "The home is regarded as the training ground for Christian leaders." Andreas Kostenberger writes, "Anyone who aspires to serve as an elder in the church, which involves exercising authority over the congregation, must properly exercise authority at home, with his children responding in obedience and submission."

The overseer's children are not required to be Christians. However, children must listen, obey, and respect their father at home. If we summarize the list, including both positive and negative traits, the main point that emerges is the need for self-control in verse 8. The list in Galatians 5 shows that this is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It serves as evidence of the Spirit's work in a person's life.

Character

The first list of five vices includes five areas that often tempt us: pride, temper, alcohol, power, and money. All five challenge each of us in the realm of self-control or self-mastery. Without self-control, a man is not fit to lead the church.

The Greek word "overbearing" was often used to describe a "peppery attitude," someone who gets easily irritated. Concerning drunkenness, the Scripture permits alcohol. The issue, however, is self-control. A pastor may face a social situation where alcohol is present, and their self-control is on display. The real question is whether drinking alcohol will be a poor witness for Christ or become a stumbling block for others.

He must not be violent. The gift of leadership often includes having a strong personality, but it should be exercised with care. We should follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ in leadership. He led by example, not through force. He led with love and compassion. The elder must not be motivated by money. A pastor should be driven by service. That does not mean a pastor shouldn't receive proper compensation.

The virtues are mostly straightforward. They include being hospitable, as referenced in 1 Timothy 3:3, 1 Peter 4:9, Hebrews 13:2, and 3 John 8. Loving what is good has no exact equivalent in 1 Timothy 3. Being sensible or self-controlled is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 2:2, and Titus 2:5. Being righteous or upright, which relates to respectability in 1 Timothy 3:2, is also found in Titus 2:12, Philippians 4:8, and Colossians 4:1. Being holy has no exact equivalent in 1 Timothy 3, but refer to 1 Timothy 2:8 and Hebrews 7:26. Self-controlled or disciplined appears in 1 Timothy 3:2.

Doctrine

In verse 9, the Apostle Paul highlights an Elder's essential understanding of truth. The Elder candidate "must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught." An elder in the church of Jesus Christ must be able to teach, exhort, and correct those who oppose the gospel truth.

John Calvin's commentary on this passage offers a clear summary of the twofold nature of a teaching ministry: "A pastor needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture provides him with the means to do both, and he who has been properly instructed in it will be able to lead those who are teachable and to refute the enemies of the truth. Paul emphasizes this dual purpose of Scripture when he states that he should be able both to exhort and to convict the gainsayers."

Verse 9 in Titus is equivalent to the qualification in 1 Timothy, "able to teach." The Elder must teach "sound" doctrine. Once again, one of Paul's favorite words for good doctrine is used, "sound" or "healthy" doctrine. One of John Calvin's quotes about sound teaching says, "All trifles vanish away before solid, or sound, teaching."

Remember, the word "sound" that Paul uses comes from the Greek word that the English word "hygiene" is based on. There is unhealthy false doctrine and sound, healthy doctrine. Paul tells us

that the elder must "hold firm" and cling to sound and healthy doctrine. Only by "holding firm" to the "trustworthy" truth of God's Word can an elder do the work God has for him.

This is what Paul emphasizes to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter three: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which can make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

For those who desire to serve in pastoral ministry, the only way to fulfill this calling as God intends is to hold steadfastly to the Word of God.

The Cretan Opposition (1:10–16)

As we have seen in Paul's letters, he often begins a new thought with the words "But" or "For." Here, he uses the latter. This "for" links what he is about to write with what he just finished saying. The apostle is now going to describe the false teachers, and this calls for proper leadership to "rebuke those who contradict" sound doctrine, as mentioned at the end of verse 9.

There are three main sections: a description of the deceivers, a Christian response to them, and an explanation of the false teachings.

A Description of the Deceivers

Similar to the approach used in the letter to 1 Timothy, Paul will now present us with a contrast. Based on what we learn from his first letter to Timothy, we should not be surprised to see another comparison between what a godly elder looks like and what the false teachers or deceivers in Crete appear to be.

At the start of verse 10, these deceivers were numerous, and we are told they were rebellious people, unruly and insubordinate. You might recall that in chapter 1 of 1 Timothy, Paul described the false teachers in Ephesus as "lawless." The same label applies to the teachers in Crete, as they were insubordinate and lawless. These false teachers were neither capable nor willing to obey God. They also could not submit to God's authority. Their teachings and lifestyles exposed their disobedience.

Instead of teaching what is sound, Paul describes them as "empty talkers." Suitable synonyms for these "empty talkers" could be long-winded, but not worth listening to. Listening to them brought no spiritual benefit. Instead of sound, healthy doctrine, they became promoters of heresy.

In 1 Timothy 1:6, Paul mentions that some individuals have strayed in "vain discussion." In his second letter to Timothy 2:16, they are called "irreverent babblers who lead people into ungodliness." They are deceivers and liars, much like Satan, the ultimate deceiver and father of all lies. Through their deception, they pull people away from sound doctrine.

Some of them, at least, were Jewish. They belonged to the circumcision group. In verse 14, the apostle tells us these deceivers dedicate themselves to Jewish myths. Possibly similar to the Jewish false teachers in Ephesus, who crafted elaborate genealogies and wild allegorical stories from the Old Testament.

In 1 Timothy 6, we examined the cause, nature, and effects of false teaching in Ephesus. Here in Crete, we can identify the cause as insubordination, which is a refusal to submit to apostolic authority. This false teaching is pointless, empty talk. Its effect is simply to deceive people, leading them away from Christ.

A Christian Response to the Deceivers

What is the proper way to respond to these false teachers? Paul provides us with the course of action. In verse 11, we are told they must be silenced. These words convey urgency. Paul does not recommend patient dialogue or peaceful arbitration simply for the sake of so-called unity in the church. Paul is very clear about what needs to be done. These false teachers must be stopped.

The Greek word in this verse means "mouth." Their mouths need to be muzzled. When you have an aggressive dog that has bitten people before and it's in a public place, what should you do? You put a muzzle on the animal so it can't bite someone. That is the idea being expressed here.

Another course of action, the apostle tells us in verse 13, is to rebuke them sharply. Notice, though, that Paul's goal was not to humiliate the Cretans but to save them from error and establish them in truth. He wants them to be "sound in faith." One of the apostles' strategies for silencing false teachers is to build believers who are sound in the faith. Proclaiming the truth through the power of the Holy Spirit is a way to remove error from the church and correct those who are deceived.

These false teachers must be silenced because their teachings are destroying entire families. The Greek concept in verse 11 is that they destroy "whole" or "entire" households with their deceptive lies.

A Description of the False Teaching

What were these false teachers teaching? What errors were they spreading in Crete? We might not have all the details, but we can describe what they taught as best as we can. In verses 12 and 13, it seems that in the ancient world, it was widely known that, as a general rule, people from Crete were liars, wicked, and lazy.

Many commentators note that this saying by a Cretan prophet about the people of Crete was written centuries before Paul and became a widely accepted idea. In the first century, Cretans gained a reputation for theft, and the island was known as a refuge for thieves and pirates. The famous Roman politician and statesman Cicero wrote that Cretans considered piracy an honorable practice. Such was the world to which the gospel was sent, and by God's sovereign grace, hearts were changed.

While it does not specify the exact content of the false teachers, it shows that their teachings were based on deception. We are told in verse 14 that they "dedicated themselves to Jewish myths and fables." As mentioned earlier, these were probably elaborate allegorical stories and genealogies that were not grounded in the revealed truth of the Old Testament.

These Jewish myths resembled the teachings in Ephesus, as Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 1:1. This teaching of myths and legends might have been similar to what was preached in the Catholic Church before the 16th century Protestant Reformation. It was a time when the focus was not on preaching Scripture but on sharing stories about saints and various miraculous acts and experiences.

We also learn from verse 14 that these teachers taught the "commands of people who turn away from the truth." This suggests a very legalistic mindset. Fallen human nature is not friendly to grace. There is something in sinful man that must add to their salvation instead of accepting it by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These false teachers "turn away from the truth." Like the false teachers at Ephesus, they have corrupted their minds and consciences. Seared and hardened, no doubt, to the point where sin no

longer bothers them. The last point from verse 16 is that these teachers were self-deceived. They believed that what they were teaching was from God. Paul says that they "professed to know God."

The truth, however, was that they were completely "unfit for any good work." The word unfit here means "disqualified." Brothers, "good work," the kind that honors God, comes from faith and love for Jesus Christ. May the Lord make each of us able to serve Him.

Study Questions

1. Paul opens this letter with one of the longest and most theologically rich salutations he ever wrote. Why do you think he took so much care to set out his apostolic calling and the purpose of the gospel right from the very first lines? What does that tell us about what he wanted Titus to keep central?
2. Paul describes the hope of eternal life as something God promised "before the ages began." How does knowing that God's plan of salvation was settled before creation even began affect the way you think about your own faith and security in Christ?
3. Paul says that the knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. Think about someone in your life whose faith clearly shows in the way they live. What does that connection between knowing the truth and living it out look like in practice? Where does it show most plainly?
4. The qualifications for elders in Titus 1 focus heavily on character, home life, and sound doctrine. Why do you think Paul spends so much time on a man's personal life and family when it comes to church leadership? What does a leader's home life reveal about his readiness to care for God's people?
5. The false teachers in Crete were described as empty talkers and deceivers whose teaching was tearing apart whole households. What made their influence so damaging? Are there patterns in today's world that remind you of this kind of teaching, and how might a congregation protect itself?
6. Paul writes that these false teachers "profess to know God but deny him by their works." That is a sobering warning. Is there a gap between what you profess and how you actually live day to day? Where might God be calling you toward greater consistency between faith and life?

Titus Chapter Two: Pastoral Duties and the Grace of God (2:1–15)

Pastoral Duties (2:1–10)

As he often does in his letters, the Apostle Paul begins another contrast at the start of chapter two, stating, “But as for you.” In chapter one, especially verses 10 through 16, Paul describes the false teachers and concludes that they are “detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.” At that point, he responds emphatically to Titus, “But as for you, teach what agrees with sound doctrine,” using the word “sound” again, which means “healthy” doctrine.

Grammatically, in chapter one, Paul gives Titus only one imperative, one command. In verse 13 of chapter one, he instructs Titus to “rebuke sharply” these false teachers. Moving into chapters 2 and 3, the apostle will now present numerous imperative statements. In fact, the entire letter has 14 imperative statements, 13 of which are in chapters 2 and 3.

Why does that matter? As a pastoral letter, we naturally want to understand the pastor’s role. These imperative commands teach us, just as they did Titus, how to respond to people and situations within the church. They guide us in understanding our pastoral duties.

There are three main groups of people in the church that the Apostle Paul is eager to instruct Titus about in his pastoral duties: teaching men, teaching women, and teaching workers. This is similar to the instruction in 1 Timothy chapter 5, where Paul addresses both older and younger men, as well as older and younger women. It is followed by a detailed discussion on widows in the church, along with guidance for slaves, similar to what is found in 1 Timothy chapter 6. Here, in Titus, Paul follows a similar pattern but does not mention widows in the churches this time.

The order Paul follows begins in verse 2 with older men, continues in verses 3 to 5 with younger women, moves to verse 6 with young men, then covers verses 7 to 8 about Titus himself, and finally addresses verses 9 to 10 on slaves. There is, of course, considerable overlap with the letter to Timothy at Ephesus, as both were younger men responsible for leading God’s people.

Teaching for Men and Titus (2:1–2, 2:6–8)

They are to be instructed by older men on what aligns with sound doctrine. They are to be “sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.” Many characteristics of older men in Christ are similar to some of the requirements for serving as church leaders.

Sober-minded, or temperate, refers to a man of moderation who avoids excess in anything. Dignified, or we might say "worthy of respect," means their attitude shows a certain seriousness about the Christian life and walking with Christ. Paul insists that older men should be self-controlled. This is the same word Paul uses to describe a qualification for pastors in 1:8.

Most importantly, these older men should be healthy or sound in three areas: faith, love, and steadfastness. In Greek, an article comes before each word, showing that each trait has special importance and focus. The apostle wants older men to show a strong trust in God, making it a clear part of their character. Brothers, are these traits something you want more and more of in life?

Andrew Bonar, a 19th century Scottish minister, wrote: "Remember that very few men and very few ministers keep up to the end the edge that was on their spirit at the first." In other words, Bonar suggests that very few Christian men continue to grow, develop, and mature spiritually throughout their lives. Many are no longer the men they once were in their younger days.

Pray, brothers, that this will not be true of us. May our love for Christ and desire to do good grow more and more until we are with Him. Moving on to verse 6, we see instructions given to Titus regarding younger men. The word "Likewise" indicates a new group. Titus's task is to urge young men to practice self-control, be sound in mind, and "control" their youthful passions.

In chapter 2, "self-control" is the most frequently mentioned trait. It appears five times in that chapter: verses 2, 4, 5, 6, and 12. As noted earlier, it is also a key characteristic for the office of an Elder. This should help us understand how much God values self-control in His church and in individual lives.

The Apostle Paul stresses the importance of the mind. Remember that the false teachers in Crete are trying to lead people away from the simplicity of God's grace in the Gospel. It is essential for these young men to develop sound minds and self-control to avoid being swayed by the devil's lies and false teachers.

In his book *Opening Up Titus*, David Campbell states, "Sober mindedness, or self-control, as we saw in connection with old men, is a whole life thing. It has a positive and wholesome impact on our speech, our behavior, the decisions we make in life, the counsel we give to others, and the ways in which we respond to various situations in life. Its value cannot be overstated."

Having self-control reflects the result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. The fallen, sinful person cannot show this self-control. Oh, that we had more of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. Paul speaks directly to Titus in verses 7 and 8: "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."

Clearly, the apostle speaks to Titus as a Christian leader in the church. These words should strongly apply to anyone in a leadership role among God's people. As a church leader, Titus needs to set a good example for others to follow. He should demonstrate doing good. That is a very important and challenging task for church elders. As a leader in your church, Christians should look at you and think, "That is the way I should live."

There should be nothing evil they can say. That is what it means to be "above reproach." John Stott encapsulates it well regarding motive, manner, and matter. The leader of Christ's church should be characterized by purity of motive, unlike the false teachers in 1:7 who are "greedy for gain." The leader should speak with a serious demeanor. We are not talking about being somber. Serious in the sense that you are handling eternal matters and proclaiming the authoritative Word of God. Lastly, the leader is sound in doctrine, offering healthy, edifying teaching for his flock.

Teaching for Women (2:3–5)

In verses 3 through 5, Paul has a message for women. The apostle often begins this section about women with the word "likewise." First, he addresses older women in the church. Titus is to challenge them with four qualities. They must first be reverent in their behavior. Next, they must not be slanderers. Third, they must not be excessive drinkers. Lastly, Titus is to instruct older women that they must "teach what is good." Given the highly immoral nature of Cretan society, the older woman who meets these criteria would undoubtedly stand out.

Verse 4 begins with a Greek hina clause, which means it functions as a purpose statement. It explains why older women in verse 3 should demonstrate the four qualities mentioned. In other words, older women are called to embody the virtues listed: reverent, not slanderers, not given to excess, and teachers of what is good, not as an end in itself. Instead, their role is to encourage and mentor younger women. Today's church desperately needs mature, experienced Christian women to guide and support the next generation.

The Apostle Paul offers guidance for young women in three pairs, beginning and ending with their relationships with their husbands. First, they are expected to be specific types of wives and mothers. They should love their husbands and children. Second, younger women in the church are to develop Christian character. They must be self-controlled, as we've seen many times, and pure. In this context, that probably means virtuous and chaste. Third, these younger women should take part in activities with the right attitude. They should be "homemakers," which literally means busy at home, and "kind." Finally, they should be "submissive to their husbands."

These qualities should be evident to honor the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul consistently emphasized that young women, and indeed all believers, must honor God in their lives. God's desire is for believers to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in doing so, reflect how God's love and grace can transform lives.

The Christian life and lifestyle should serve as a testimony to the power of God's grace. As verse 10 shows, the believer must "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

Teaching for Workers (2:9–10)

The final group that the Apostle Paul addresses in this section appears in verses 9 and 10. The first thing to observe is that, in a list of instructions based on gender and age, the Apostle Paul now shifts focus away from these categories to address Christians who are in bondage as slaves. We saw this earlier in 1 Timothy at the start of chapter 6.

It is estimated that approximately 25 percent of the Roman world was enslaved in the 1st century. As horrible and disturbing as the practice of slavery is, at any point in history, it's worth noting that in the New Testament letters, Paul's primary concern is not to overturn the slavery system. He does have a word for slaves in his first letter to the Corinthians in 7:21 when he wrote, "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you, although if you can gain your freedom, do so."

The Apostle's primary concern for the believer is the kingdom of God, not this temporary world. There is a common element among these Christian groups. Paul's main message is that believers should share the gospel in a world that doesn't believe. Adorning the doctrine of God our Savior is the apostle's top priority.

The Greek verb "adorn" was used to describe arranging jewelry to display their beauty. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a treasure. It is a pearl of great value. Through His words and life, the person in Christ should reflect a piece of this precious treasure to a lost world full of sin. This closely resembles the message the apostle delivered to Timothy about the slaves in Ephesus. Chapter 6, verse 1 of 1 Timothy states, "Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled."

No matter who we are in this world, rich, poor, famous, unknown, kings, or slaves, the first priority as believers is to honor Jesus Christ by living out the gospel. That, in a nutshell, is Paul's message to Titus and Timothy. That is why bondservants are to submit to their masters, why they should please them, why they must not talk back, and why they must show good faith.

Theological Framework and Motivation for Ministry (2:11–15)

The next part covers chapter two, verses 11–15. It is called a "theological framework and motivation for ministry." Note the familiar connecting word "for" at the beginning of verse 11. What does it connect to? It links to the end of verse 10, where Paul writes, "God our Savior."

It is a common pattern in the Apostle Paul's letters that once he mentions "God our Savior," words like the "gospel of grace," "the cross," and many other phrases activate his thoughts, prompting him to elaborate on the subject again and again, and to burst into praise to the Lord. Like a young child who has just learned something new and wants to tell his parents, Paul must praise the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle highlights two main reasons for committed service to Christ in this section. They are, first, God's saving grace, and second, the hope of the Lord Jesus' return. It is important to understand the context of the different groups of people Paul describes in verses 1 through 10. Each group of believers is called to live lives that honor God.

Then, in verse 12, he provides the answer. God's grace teaches believers to reject ungodliness and live righteously while awaiting the Savior's return. In short, as one of the main messages of the Pastoral letters emphasizes, proper Christ-centered behavior comes from proper theology. In other words, sound doctrine must lead to a Christ-honoring life. If it doesn't, and you claim to be a Christian, you're fooling yourself.

The Grace of God

The grace of God is a powerful force for believers in Christ. We often hear grace defined as God's unmerited favor. That is true, but there is so much more that could be said.

R.C. Sproul wrote, "When we truly understand grace, when we see that God only owes us wrath but has provided Christ's merit to cover our demerit, then everything changes. The Christian motivation for ethics is not merely to obey some abstract law or a list of rules; rather, our response is provoked by gratitude. Jesus understood that when He said, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments.' If I may have the liberty to paraphrase: 'Keep My commandments not because you want to be just, but because you love Me.' A true understanding of grace, of God's unmerited favor, always provokes a life of gratitude and obedience."

Grace brings about new life in Christ and helps us live Christian lives in an evil world after conversion. Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Philippi 2:12–13, "Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but now even more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good purpose."

The truth is that for the believer, God's grace should inspire us to love Christ so deeply that sin becomes completely offensive, and we desire nothing to do with it. We need to reach a point in our Christian journey where the pleasure of sin no longer outweighs the guilt and separation from the Lord. A good way to assess your spiritual well-being is to ask if you hate sin and want to be free from it.

The Puritan John Owen, in his well-known book titled Mortification of Sin, wrote, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." It is a shame, but in today's world, even Christians do not like to be told they are sinners. How much we need grace.

If we relied only on ourselves, we would be no match for sin and Satan. The good news, though, is that if we are in Christ, we are not left to ourselves. Grace teaches us to say no to sinful passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to everyone. The apostle emphasizes that God's grace has revealed itself and is now freely available to all people.

So, the first requirement for ministry and living a Christ-centered life is God's grace in Christ Jesus. Brothers, our ongoing sanctification, the process of becoming more like Jesus Christ, also relies on God's grace. Paul uses similar words when writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8 through 12.

God's purpose and grace toward us before the ages began, and our anticipation of "that Day," which is Christ's return, serve as strong motivations to serve the Lord and His people. This is the reason why we should be "zealous for good works."

Expectation of Christ's Return

In verse 12, the apostle describes the current age and how salvation through Christ affects us today. The "present age" has not yet fully ended; we are still living in it. However, there is another age in which the believer is "waiting." It is important to note that Paul's focus isn't just on the wonderful coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. His hope lies in the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior."

The Greek word Paul uses in Verse 13, translated as "appearing," is the word we use for epiphany, which means a manifestation or appearance of something. The root of the word epiphany in Classical Greek was used to describe the breaking of dawn each morning, as the sun reappears. It does not mean that something new comes into existence; instead, it means that something already existing appears.

The main point is that the Apostle Paul highlights the long-awaited glory of Christ, which exists in heaven now and will finally be revealed to the entire world. Every eye will see, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God. What a glorious day that will be. Jesus, during His first epiphany, was humble and lowly. It is wonderful to think that it will not be that way at His next epiphany. He will come in all His glory.

The Apostle Paul highlights that the reality of the incarnation in verse 11 is the foundation of our hope for Christ's return at His second coming. Author Gordon Fee writes, "The second coming is the final manifestation of God's full glory," just as the first advent revealed God's grace.

Christ has redeemed us by purchasing us from the slave market of sin, and through grace, He is transforming His bride to be pleasing to Him. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ. What our Savior

has done for us motivates each of us to be passionate about good works; in other words, eager to do the deeds that honor the Lord Jesus.

Verses 13 and 14 serve as a doxology in multiple ways. The Greek word for glory is "doxa." These verses praise and give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to note that when Paul writes of "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," he is referring to a single person. This is one of the clearest Christological confessions in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is God.

Beware of a cult group called Jehovah's Witnesses, who often go door-to-door, handing out literature and trying to draw people into their false teachings. One of their many heretical errors is their belief that Jesus is not the eternal God. They may seem friendly, but in reality, they are greatly deceived and are spreading a false gospel. Their claims lack solid biblical support, even though they try to justify their views with their own translation of the Bible, which is filled with heresy. If they attempt to engage you in discussion, it's helpful to start by questioning the divinity of Jesus. They will deny that Jesus is the eternal God who came into the world. They will deny that Christ is both human and divine. They will also deny the Holy Trinity. This passage in Titus, along with several other New Testament texts, especially John 1, clearly affirms the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we eagerly await the day when Jesus returns and a new heaven and a new earth appear? A world where sin is forever eradicated? I sometimes wonder whether the Second Coming of Christ receives enough attention in Reformed churches. Maybe if it did, we would be inspired to live more Christlike lives.

That seems to reflect Apostle John's perspective as he discusses the future return of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 John 3:2–3, he writes, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." May that be our blessed hope today.

Conclusion (2:15)

In verse 15, the Apostle Paul wraps up the theological framework and motivation for ministry laid out in verses 11 through 14. In other words, he has just explained to Titus the theological

foundation for "good works," namely God's grace in redeeming sinners and the hope of his second coming when Christ returns in glory. Verse 15 also serves as a transition into chapter 3.

Paul turns his attention directly to Titus and urges him to "teach these things." You might recall the phrase "these things," which the apostle often used in his first letter to Timothy. It serves as a summary statement, sometimes referring to previous content and other times previewing upcoming topics. Paul uses the same phrase seven times in 1 Timothy, but it appears only once in Titus.

Imperatives, often a personal charge, usually follow it. The charge, found in verse 15, contains three verbs: declare, exhort (better translated as "encourage"), and rebuke. The Greek word "declare" is the same as in 2:1 and means "teach." Nonetheless, we observe a "literary inclusio" in which the author begins and ends with the same expression. In this case, "teach" or "declare" appears in 2:1 and 2:15.

The next word, "exhort," could be translated as "encourage." I prefer "to encourage" because Paul's tone is gentler than in his direct writing about the false teachers. Finally, "to rebuke with all authority." Bill Mounce writes, "These instructions are given to Titus, Paul's delegate, and he is to exercise his full delegated authority. One can assume that this strong language is intended more for the Cretan church than for Titus."

The apostle concludes by telling Titus to "let no one disregard you." In some ways, aside from mentioning Titus' youth, "let no one disregard you" echoes Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12: "Let no one despise you for your youth." That would have encouraged Titus and shown those reading the letter that they should respect and listen to him as if Paul himself were in Crete.

Study Questions

1. Paul addresses older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves, each with specific encouragements suited to their situation. Why do you think he takes such care to speak to each group personally rather than giving one general instruction for everyone? What does this tell us about how God sees His people?
2. Self-control appears no fewer than five times in this one chapter. That is clearly not an accident. Why do you think this quality is so central to the kind of life that honors Christ? In which area of your own life do you feel most in need of this grace right now?
3. Paul tells older women to teach what is good and to pass on godly wisdom to younger women. Who in your life has played that kind of role for you? Is there anyone younger in the faith whom you might be able to encourage, pray for, or walk alongside in a similar way?
4. Paul describes the grace of God as something that not only saves us but also teaches us to say no to ungodliness and to live rightly in this present age. How have you personally experienced God's grace not just forgiving you but actually shaping and changing the way you live?
5. The blessed hope of Christ's return is central to Paul's motivation for godly living. He seems to believe that if you are truly looking forward to that day, it will affect how you live right now. Does thinking about the return of Christ shape your daily life in any practical way? What would change if it did?
6. Paul tells Titus to teach, encourage, and rebuke with full authority, and to let no one look down on him. What is the relationship between a leader's character and the authority that comes with his calling? How does a person earn the kind of respect that makes their teaching and correction truly welcomed?

Titus Chapter Three: Living as the Church in This World (3:1–15)

The Christian in the World (3:1–2)

The overall emphasis remains largely the same in the final chapter of the apostle's letter to his delegate, Titus, on the island of Crete. Paul continues to promote godly living for the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter one, Paul highlighted the believer's sanctification within the church community. In chapter two, his focus was on different groups within the body of Christ: the older, the younger, men, women, and slaves. In chapter three, his emphasis shifts to Christians in general, those living in a sinful, cursed world.

The chapter is divided into three main sections: The Christian in the World (verses 1 through 2); The revelation of God's kindness and love in Christ (verses 3 through 8); and final instructions (verses 9 through 15).

In chapter 3, verses 1, 8, and 14, Paul emphasizes the importance of "good works" three times. The phrase is also repeated in 1:16 and 2:7, 14. As Paul concludes in chapter 2, verse 14, he writes that because we are bought and paid for by Jesus Christ in our redemption, Christians must be "zealous for good works."

This "good works" message appears often in the New Testament. It is always the result of, not the cause of, God's grace. Ephesians 2:10 states, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." This point is also emphasized by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

It is also a point our Lord emphasizes in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

In verses 1 and 2, Paul teaches Titus how believers should behave and what their attitude should be toward civil authorities and "all people" in general. In chapter two, Paul instructed wives and slaves to submit. He now expands on this by emphasizing the importance of all believers submitting to rulers and authorities.

These initial two verses contain seven commands, with "submit" as the main directive. There are two specific evangelistic reasons that explain why Christians need to follow these commands. The first is being "ready for every good work." The idea is that being submissive to authorities, avoiding slander, refraining from fighting, and demonstrating kindness and gentleness toward everyone are the preparations necessary for "good works."

The second reason obeying these commands is so important is that it strengthens our gospel witness and testimony to a world lost in sin. This is always the concern of the Apostle Paul for Christians. In chapter 1, verse 16, Paul describes the false teachers. They "profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work."

The traits of the false teachers, outlined earlier in the letter (1:10–12), are "insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, teaching for shameful gain, liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons." By God's grace, believers are meant to be the exact opposite of the false teachers. We should avoid speaking ill of others; it's essential to steer clear of arguments and to be gentle and courteous. Your sanctification brings honor and support to the Gospel. A sinful life is, in fact, the opposite.

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's comparing and contrasting the believer with the unbeliever. Just as the false teacher is "unfit" for good works, the believer must be fit and "ready for every good work." This is how a Christian shines his light before others, so they may see good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven.

The Revelation of God's Kindness and Love in Christ (3:3–8)

Moving on to our next set of verses, the apostle does at least two things. He gives a wonderful description of God's work of salvation in the life of the believer. Second, he offers the main reasons why believers should be gentle, courteous, loving, kind, and involved in "good works."

In verse 3, Paul lists a series of sins that describe the past depravity of believers before their conversion. In chapter 3, verses 4 through 7, he provides a wonderful description of God's power in the work of regeneration. These verses establish the theological foundation for all the good works that Christians pursue. Finally, in verse 8, we see another "trustworthy saying" that connects back to verses 4 through 7. As with these sayings, the topic is salvation in Christ.

In his commentary on Titus, John Calvin writes, "Nothing is better suited to humble our pride and simultaneously temper our harshness than showing that everything we direct at others can rebound

on ourselves." Undoubtedly, a person who believes in Christ should be the humblest individual in the world. We must genuinely believe in our hearts that we are not better than anyone else. We understand that a horrible, sinful nature stays within us, and if it weren't for God's grace, we would quickly fall into the same old sins.

Titus 3:3 closely resembles the letter Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, describing their spiritual condition before coming to faith. In Ephesians 2:1–3, Paul discusses being dead in trespasses and sins and following the ways of this world.

In Titus 3:3, the Holy Spirit reminds us that all salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is His work, not ours, by listing the depraved characteristics of a person outside of Christ before regeneration. It also teaches us the great need we have for salvation. In ourselves, we have absolutely nothing to boast about. We will carry our sinful nature to the grave.

Jeremiah 17:9 states, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Galatians 5:17 declares, "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing what you want to do." Our attitude and thoughts about pride and boasting should reflect those of the Apostle Paul, who wrote to the Galatians in 6:14, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Maybe you've wondered why God allows us to keep struggling with sin, even after we are born again. Could it be that our sinful nature stays with us until we leave this world because it humbles us and helps us realize how much we need the Holy Spirit's help to grow in sanctification?

Verse 3 states, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another." Verse 4, however, says, "When the goodness and lovingkindness of God appeared!" We should really appreciate the "buts" in Scripture. The apostle often uses the word "but" to contrast what the Christian once was, dead in sin, with what they are now, alive in Christ.

In the ESV, the Greek word "loving kindness" is "Philanthropia," which is where we get our English word for Philanthropist. It combines two Greek words that are likely familiar to us: Phileo, meaning Love, and Anthropos, meaning Man. The Apostle Paul uses this word only once across

all his writings. It is fascinating and wonderful that it is used in the context of God's response to the deep need we all have because of sin's corruption.

The common understanding of "Philanthropist" today is not the primary meaning used in Scripture. The Word of God presents a much broader view of philanthropy than what we're usually accustomed to. It's more than just wealthy people donating to a favorite cause, regardless of how noble the reason.

While it is admirable that individuals donate billions to various charitable causes, Scripture's emphasis on philanthropy broadens the definition to include both the physical and spiritual aspects of man. The main point to remember is that God's response to our need for mercy and grace forms the basis for our own acts of good works and love toward our neighbor. It is the foundation for "good works."

We might say that God's philanthropy, demonstrated by sending Christ and redeeming us, forms the foundation of Christians' concern and compassion for the world. Our own proclamation of Christ and not turning a blind eye to the needs of those around us shows the world that we belong to Christ.

Many biblical scholars believe that this section in Titus is probably another creedal statement used in early church worship. If that's true, then verses 5 through 7 are essential to it. Verse 5 states, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

God saves believers not because they earn it but because He is merciful. Works of righteousness have no influence on God's decision to save. How difficult is it for the natural man to accept this? If we went out on the street, asked every person passing by how to get to heaven, sadly, most would say, "Well, I have lived a decent life and haven't been too bad. I have helped people as much as I can and supported this charity and that charity. I think God will accept me." No. Those are "works of righteousness," which is the hope of a Pharisee.

The main clause in verses 3 through 8 is the phrase "he saved us." In his comments on this part of Titus, John Stott calls verses 3 through 7 the "Ingredients of Salvation." Verse 3 clearly shows the "need of salvation," followed by the "source of salvation," which is the kindness and love of God our Savior, as seen at the beginning of verse 4.

Next we have the "ground of salvation," which is His mercy in sending our Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul mentions our Savior's appearance in 3:4, which should remind us of the epiphany in 2:11, where Paul writes, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people." Next, the means of salvation are washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

I believe the washing mentioned here is not meant to be baptism, although many commentators hold that view. I agree with William Hendrickson, who writes, "The washing referred to is wholly spiritual." This is definitely what our Savior was referring to in John 3:5, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

The Holy Spirit sanctifies believers through regeneration and renewal, transforming them into a new creation in Christ. Water throughout the Bible symbolizes spiritual cleansing. The apostle likely thought of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel 36:25 through 27 states, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." That is the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

The term "regeneration," when referring to individuals, is found only in this one passage in the New Testament. The Greek word literally means "new birth." Although the specific word "regeneration" in relation to an individual appears only once here in Titus, the idea of spiritual rebirth is mentioned multiple times throughout the New Testament.

Perhaps the most well-known example is the words of our Savior in John 3:3. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We can say that unless someone undergoes the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, they cannot see the kingdom of God.

Along with regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul discusses the process of renewal. This "renewal" represents the believer's sanctification in the Lord Jesus Christ. Question 35 from Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is sanctification?" Answer: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole person after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

Chapter 13 of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, in its first paragraph, describes biblical Sanctification, or renewal, as it is called here in Titus three: “Those who are united to Christ and effectually called and regenerated have a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. They are also further sanctified, really and personally, through the same power, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them. The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the various evil desires that arise from it are more and more weakened and put to death. At the same time, those called and regenerated are more and more enlivened and strengthened in all saving graces so that they practice true holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”

Classic Reformed theology teaches that sanctification has two aspects. The first is definitive sanctification, which is given to the believer as part of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord prayed in John 17 that His disciples would be sanctified, made holy. This is a crucial and essential truth in any study of sanctification. The believer’s holiness is directly connected to the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Great High Priest is the foundation for the sanctification of all believers.

The Christian is considered holy because he or she is united with the Lord Jesus Christ. John 17:19 states, “For them, I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” First Corinthians 1:30 declares, “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.”

The second aspect of this sanctification in traditional Reformed theology is called progressive sanctification. It is the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ, which occurs throughout a believer’s life. The aim of progressive sanctification is transformation. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17 through 18, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Then, in Romans 12:2, the apostle writes, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” In summary, this renewal is the process of growing more holy before our Holy God. Is that your heart’s desire today?

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a devout Scottish pastor from long ago, often prayed, "Lord, make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be."

The renowned Puritan theologian John Owen said, "Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts." Oh, that God, by His grace, would enable each of us to hate sin and become more like our Lord Jesus Christ. That is an example of progressive sanctification.

Another result of this rich passage is that the regenerated believer is "justified." The doctrine of justification is a common topic for the Apostle Paul in the New Testament and holds great significance for biblical Christianity. Professor John Murray, a Scottish theologian who taught at Westminster Seminary in the United States for most of his life, offers a constructive definition of this doctrine.

He writes, "Justification is that aspect of the application of redemption whereby God delivers us from condemnation, accepts us as righteous in his sight, and receives us into his favor and fellowship. It is an act of God, accomplished in time, wherein God passes judgment with respect to us as individuals. Justification is a judicial or forensic term and refers to a judgment conceived, recognized, and declared with respect to judicial status."

This is very important, and you should understand it clearly. Justification does not mean making someone righteous, upright, or holy; it means to declare oneself righteous. What a glorious truth! In Jesus Christ, through His perfect obedience and righteousness, and based on His atonement and resurrection, God declares the sinner just in His eyes in the divine courtroom. If that doesn't make us rejoice, nothing will. That, brothers, is worthy of our praise to God.

Perhaps one of the clearest and most concise passages about God's work in renewal is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

The final aspect of this great salvation, as Paul mentions in verse 7, is the wonderful goal of God's work: the sure and certain hope of eternal life. Listen again to Titus 3:7: "So that being justified

by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." This is the same hope Paul refers to at the beginning of this letter in verse 2 of chapter 1. There he wrote, "In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began."

The heirs are those who are both transformed and declared righteous by God. William Mounce writes about this text, "The ultimate goal of God's initiative and Christ's and the Spirit's labors is that believers become heirs of eternal life."

This passage illustrates that the great work of salvation, which was planned and purposed before the beginning of time, is a work of the Holy Trinity. Notice that both God, in verse 4, and Jesus Christ, in verse 6, are identified as "our Savior." In verse 5, the Holy Spirit is described as the means or power behind it, the "washing of regeneration and renewal." Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Trustworthy Saying (3:8)

We reach another "Trustworthy Saying" in verse 8. In verses 4 through 7, the Apostle Paul makes one of the most beautiful and profound statements in Scripture about God's work of salvation. It is a work of redemption in Christ that spans past, present, and future. It is probably verses 4 through 7 that Paul is referring to when he writes, "The saying is trustworthy." Commentators are quite divided. In other words, in this case, he refers to what he has just written, not what he is about to write. This is not always true for the Apostle Paul's "trustworthy sayings." There are a total of 5 trustworthy sayings in the Pastoral Letters. They seem to refer back twice, and three times, they appear to mean what Paul is about to write.

Once again, the apostle emphasizes that if we truly possess this great salvation in Christ just described, good works will show the faith we have. Titus 3:8 states, "The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people."

John Stott adds "good works" as another "ingredient" of salvation. He reminds us that "good works" for the glory of our Savior is evidence that we know and love him. Titus must "insist" that believers diligently dedicate themselves to good works. When we interview someone who wants to join our church, I often read Ephesians 2:10 and ask whether they have considered how they can serve the Lord through the works He has prepared for them. Ephesians 2:10 states, "For we

are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Final Instructions (3:9–15)

As we conclude the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus, we move on to the section titled "Final Instructions." Throughout church history, some men have caused major divisions within the church, while others have been a great blessing and encouragement to the saints. In these final instructions, Paul writes to Titus to help him understand how to deal with both kinds of people.

In verses 9 through 11, the apostle revisits a topic he discussed earlier in the letter, in chapter one, verses 10 through 16: empty talkers and deceivers. The apostle begins verse 9 with the familiar word "but," indicating an immediate contrast. Verses 9 through 11 contrast with what Paul wrote in verses 1 through 8 of chapter 3.

You might remember that avoiding foolish controversies and genealogies was a topic Paul discussed in his first letter to Timothy in 1:3–7. Paul also addresses this same subject in his second letter to Timothy. There, he writes in 2 Timothy 2:23, "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels." Here in Titus, once again, Jewish myths taught by false teachers are the source of the problem in Crete.

The Apostle, being the apostle, does not ignore the problem. He takes it seriously. How many church leaders have failed to act because they didn't want to confront people? Although most of us dislike confrontation, including myself, we must address false teaching when it occurs. Why? It leads to arguments, is unproductive, and harms both Christ's cause and the believer.

How should these people be handled? Paul tells Titus in verse 9 that we are to avoid foolishness, but that's only part of what's needed. The individual or individuals spreading controversy must be confronted. If anyone in the church has taught or believed what these false teachers presented, Paul emphasizes that we should first warn them. If they refuse to listen to the warning, you must warn them a second time. If the second warning fails, we are instructed to have no further involvement with them.

It is important to note that Paul does not give Titus all the details on how to handle church discipline. The passage in Titus, however, is closely similar to Matthew 18:15–17, where Jesus gives instructions on discipline. Of course, the main goal is to promote Christ-honoring teaching

while doing everything possible to preserve Christian unity within the body. However, unity should never be prioritized if false teaching causes division and leads people away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, the apostle concludes the letter with personal instructions and greetings. Paul's initial instruction is for Titus to meet him in Nicopolis, where he plans to spend the winter. Nicopolis was the capital of a Roman province, located near present-day Preveza, Greece. Sitting on the Adriatic Sea, it was well known in ancient times for its two harbors. It was over 300 miles from Crete, which would have taken about five to ten days to travel by sea.

Titus was not supposed to leave until a replacement arrived, either Artemas, an unknown figure in the New Testament, or Tychicus, a well-known associate of the apostle from the province of Asia. Tychicus delivered Paul's letters to Ephesus and Colossae. See Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, and 2 Timothy 4:12. It was probably Artemas who replaced Titus in Crete. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul mentions that Titus was sent to Dalmatia and Tychicus was sent to Ephesus.

Titus was also to help Zenas, the lawyer, and assist Apollos, who, as we learn elsewhere in the New Testament, was an eloquent speaker. Just before his final words of "Grace to all," we should notice that a familiar concern is mentioned again. In verse 14, "Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works."

We will conclude this study of Titus in this manner. We should learn to dedicate ourselves to Christ's cause, and as church elders and teachers, we must encourage our fellow Christians to undertake the important task of expanding Christ's kingdom.

Study Questions

1. Paul begins this chapter by reminding believers to be submissive to rulers and authorities and to be ready for every good work. Why do you think a Christian's posture toward civil authorities matters so much to the health of their gospel witness? How does this apply in the world we live in today?
2. Paul reminds Titus and the Cretan believers of what they once were: foolish, disobedient, enslaved to passions, and full of envy and malice. Why is it so important for Christians to keep that "before grace" picture in view? How does remembering where we came from change how we treat those around us who are still outside of Christ?
3. Titus 3:4–7 is one of the most beautiful descriptions of God's saving work in the entire New Testament. It covers the kindness of God, the mercy of Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, justification, and the hope of eternal life. Which of these aspects of salvation means the most to you personally right now, and why?
4. Paul says that God saved us "not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy." That is the heart of the gospel. How do you guard your heart against the very natural human tendency to feel that your standing before God depends, at least in part, on how well you are doing spiritually?
5. Paul tells Titus to avoid foolish controversies and quarrels because they are unprofitable and worthless, and to warn a divisive person and then have nothing more to do with them. This can feel very uncomfortable. What does pursuing unity in the church look like in practice without simply avoiding every hard conversation? Where is the line?
6. The letter closes with Paul urging that believers "learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need." As you come to the end of this study of Titus, what is one specific and practical step you sense God calling you to take in response to what you have learned?

Conclusion: Adorning the Doctrine of God Our Savior

Titus is a short letter, but few letters in the New Testament contain as much theology and practical wisdom in so small a space. In three brief chapters, the Apostle Paul gives Titus, and through him the churches scattered across the island of Crete, nearly everything a congregation needs to order its life faithfully in a hostile and undisciplined culture. He addresses the qualifications for elders, the character of false teachers, the responsibilities of every group within the household of faith, the grace of God that trains us to live godly lives now, and the washing of regeneration that has made us heirs of eternal life.

The Cretans, according to their own poet, had a well-known reputation for laziness, dishonesty, and brutality. Into that environment, Paul sent Titus, a trusted and capable coworker, with instructions to set in order what remained and to appoint elders in every town. The gospel was never intended to stay a private conviction, untouched by the challenges of ordinary life. It was meant to take root in real congregations, made up of real people with real and sometimes difficult histories, and to visibly reshape how they lived. What was true on Crete in the first century remains true wherever the church is planted today. The gospel does not wait for a welcoming culture before it begins its transforming work. It plants itself in difficult soil and grows there by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The phrase that perhaps best captures this letter's objective appears in chapter two, verse ten, where Paul instructs bondservants, and through them every believer, to conduct themselves so well that they will "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every way." This is a remarkable image. Sound doctrine is compared to a person who can be dressed well or poorly. Right belief, rightly held, is meant to be displayed in the world through the ordinary conduct of ordinary believers: submissive citizens, honest workers, faithful spouses, self-controlled young people, and dignified older men and women. None of this is glamorous. Little of it would be noticed on its own. Together, this quiet faithfulness nonetheless clothes the doctrine of God our Savior in a beauty that argument alone could never provide.

This is why Paul returns so often in this short letter to the theme of good works. He does not want Titus or the Cretan believers to think that grace and good works are in opposition to each other. The grace of God, as he writes in chapter two, has appeared, "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Grace

does not simply forgive the sinner and leave him unchanged. It enrolls him in a school of righteousness and teaches him, patiently and over a lifetime, to live differently. The Christian who has been washed by the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, described so beautifully in chapter three, is not left where he was found. He is made a new creature, an heir according to the hope of eternal life, and that new identity moves outward into a life devoted to good works.

Standing behind every instruction in this letter, whether to elders, to older men, to older women, to younger women, to young men, to slaves, or to the church as a whole, is the same unifying reality that shaped First Timothy: the church is the household of God, and the God who owns this household has revealed his own character in the gospel. Titus does not use that exact phrase as First Timothy does, but the idea is present throughout. God is called "our Savior" four times in this short letter, more frequently than in any other book of the New Testament. Salvation is not an abstract doctrine to Paul. It is the very name by which God has made Himself known to Titus and to the believers on Crete, and it is the name by which he continues to make himself known to the church today.

The letter's final words, so easily overlooked, are worth pausing over one last time. After naming Zenas and Apollos, after mentioning the needs of the saints, and after a final call to good works, Paul closes simply, "Grace be with you all." He does not say grace be with you, Titus, even though the letter has addressed him personally from the beginning. Instead, Paul extends grace to the whole congregation, to all the people involved in the ongoing and unfinished work on Crete that Titus had been sent to set in order. This is a fitting ending because grace is where the letter began, in the opening greeting of chapter one, and grace is what has sustained every instruction and encouragement along the way. The God who saves by grace is the same God who trains his people by grace to live well in the present age. It is by that same grace, sufficient at the beginning of the Christian life and sufficient at its end, that Titus, the elders of Crete, and every reader of this letter since have been kept and will be kept until the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Epistle to Titus Outline

I. Opening Salutation (1:1–4)

A. Paul's apostolic mission

1. The faith of God's elect

2. The truth that leads to godliness

3. The hope of eternal life

4. The preaching

II. The Elders (1:5–9)

A. Summary Elder/Bishop (xref. 1 Timothy 3:1–13)

- https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-13-how-recognize-elder-titus-15-9-1-timothy-31-7

1. One and the same office

2. Plurality of overseers

3. Teaching gifts

4. Congregation Approval

B. Blameless in three areas

1. Home life

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUBjneThxdo

2. Character

   Five **vices** xref. 1 Timothy 3

   - Not arrogant or (not overbearing), 1 Tim 3:2, "temperate", 2 Peter 2:10, Proverbs 21:24
   - Not hot-tempered (not quarrelsome), 1 Tim 3:3
   - Not an excessive drinker (not a drunkard), 1Tim 3:3, 1 Tim 3:8, Eph. 5:18
   - Not a bully or violent, 1 Tim 3:3
   - Not greedy for money, 1 Tim 3:3, 1 Tim 3:8, 1 Peter 5:2

Six positive **virtues, cross-reference** - 1 Timothy 3

- Hospitable, 1 Tim 3:3, 1 Peter 4:9, Heb. 13:2, 3 John 8
- Loving what is good (no exact equivalent in 1 Tim 3)
- Sensible or self-controlled, 1 Tim 3:2, Titus 2:2, Titus 2:5
- Righteous or upright (respectable) 1 Tim 3:2, Titus 2:12, Phil 4:8, Col 4:1
- Holy, (no exact equivalent in 1 Tim 3) but see 1 Tim 2:8, Heb 7:26
- Self-controlled or disciplined 1 Tim 3:2 (see "sensible" above)

3. Doctrine

III. The Cretan Opposition (1:10–16)

A. A description of the deceiver

B. A Christian response to the deceivers

C. A description of the false teaching

Titus 2

I. Pastoral duties (2:1–10)

A. Teaching for men/Titus (2:1–2, 2:6–8)

B. Teaching for women (2:3–5)

C. Teaching for workers (2:9,10)

II. Theological framework and motivation for ministry (2:11–15)

A. Motivation for Ministry

1. The grace of God

2. Expectation of Christ's return

B. Conclusion

Titus 3

I. Living as the Church in this world (3:1–8)

A. The Christian in the world (3:1–2)

1. Evangelistic reasons for obedience

a) Preparation of "good works"

b) Honor and glorify Jesus Christ

B. The revelation of God's kindness and love in Christ (3:3–8)

1. The ultimate reasons for "good works"

a) Our depravity by nature

b) God's kindness and love: philanthropy

c) "Ingredients of salvation"

(1) Need

(2) Source

(3) Ground

(4) Means

(5) Results

- What is sanctification? (See article)

- What is justification? (See article)

(6) Goal

2. "Trustworthy saying"

a) Prior text

b) Evidence

II. Final Instructions (3:9–15)

A. Dealing with divisive members (3:9–11)

B. Concluding personal instructions and final greetings (3:12–15)